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EDITORIAL STAFF: Kerker Quinn, Charles Shattuck, George Scouffas, Roberta Scouffas, Allen Hayman, David Joel, Oliver Rice. Non-resident: Robert Bauer, Donald Hill, Carl Hartman. Secretarial assistants: Ruby Mason, Mary Kay Peer, Betty Sereno.

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CONTRIBUTORS

ROBERT MARTIN ADAMS, of the English faculty at Cornell, is at work on two critical volumes (one on Milton, the other consisting of comparative studies of modern and historical authors).

MELISSA BLAKE is the author of a book of poems, *Creatures of the Big Sur* (named from the California community where she lives).

WARREN CARRIER is collaborating with Paul Engle on an anthology of poems-with-analyses, in which his piece on Stevens will appear.

DANIEL CURLEY, herewith contributing his fifth story to the quarterly, teaches at Plattsburgh (New York) Teachers College.

DON GORDON, of Los Angeles, has contributed to *Harper's, Poetry,* the *New Republic,* etc., and has published two books of verse, *Statement* and *Civilian Poems.*

JAMES HAFLEY'S essay, somewhat expanded, will be a portion of his forthcoming book, *Virginia Woolf as Novelist.* He teaches at The Catholic University of America.

FRANK HOLWERDA lives on a ranch near Renton, Wash. 'Char' is his first published story.

RANDALL JARRELL, author of four notable collections of poetry during the last ten years, will publish a book of critical essays *(Poetry and the Age)* this summer and a novel *(Pictures from an Institution)* in 1954.

CHARLOTTE MARLETTO'S first book of verse will soon be released by Delta Press (University of Mississippi). She lives in Los Angeles.

SHERMAN PAUL, author of *Emerson's Angle of Vision,* teaches American Literature at Illinois.

GORDON N. RAY, widely known for his Thackeray research, is head of the Department of English at Illinois.

WALLACE STEVENS' most recent publications are *The Auroras of Autumn* (poems) and *The Necessary Angel* (essays on the art of poetry).

JOAN WHITE is on the faculty of Citrus Junior College, Azusa, California.

LOUIS ZUKOFSKY has appeared in the *Dial, Poetry, New Directions, Botteghe Oscure,* etc. Among his books of poetry are *The First Half of 'A,' 55 Poems,* and *Anew.*

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WALLACE STEVENS:

The Planet on the Table

Ariel was glad he had written his poems.
They were of a remembered time
Or of something seen that he liked.

Other makings of the sun
Were waste and welter.
And the ripe shrub writhed.

His self and the sun were one
And his poems, although makings of his self,
Were no less makings of the sun.

It was not important that they survive.
What mattered was that they should bear
Some lineament or character,

Some affluence, if only half-perceived,
In the poverty of their words,
Of the planet of which they were part.

RANDALL JARRELL:

The Sphinx's Riddle to Oedipus

Not to have guessed is better: what is, ends,
But among fellows, with reluctance,
Clasped by the Woman-Breasted, Lion-Pawed.

To have clasped in one's own arms a mother,
To have killed with one's own hands a father —
Is not this, Lame One, to have been alone?

The seer is doomed for seeing: and to understand
Is to pluck out one's own eyes with one's own hands.
But speak: what has a woman's breasts, a lion's paws?

You stand at midday in the marketplace
Before your life: to see is to have spoken.
—Yet to see, Blind One, is to be alone.

DON GORDON:

The Pensioner

Methodical as the beetle, appearing always
in the same corner
Of the cell, the man in the world-wide stone
arrives with the sun:
Perhaps there is comfort in the steady line
of trees
Or in the exact view of the lake, mud-colored,
broken by the baroque swans.

Strangers rush from his eye in the direction
he already knows.
He turns from the children with their myths
and painful laughter,
Fearless in the non-existent shell, tender
as their white boats.

The ceiling barely sustains the burden
of blackened skies;
Night excludes in the furnished room the city
of wheels and music;
The man disconnects his mind, pursues himself
over the wasted fields of sleep.

Morning strikes like an assailant, requiring
memory and motion:
The steps of a woman. . . the rattle of dishes. . .
the intolerable smell
Of spices and bread ascends to someone young
in a house somewhere

someone is rising
at a point in time

with
nothing to do
nowhere to go
no
one

CHARLOTTE MARLETTO:

Each a Yellow Emperor

never such splendor
as the thistledown journey
of prince moving southward
his land of sun

face a mirror
in the Kuenlun mountains
heart embraced
in the summit of salt

never such brocade of birds
as the singing robe
flared from the body
of sighing

never such pearl as summer
large as lake
rolled from the finger
swallowed by earth

nor the cardinal lackey
Eloquence
at the corners of earth
who implores but as

Nothing who calls forth the dew
and distills the gem
to carriage the clockwise splendor
of

never such royal journey
as the taffeta turning over
of armature of love
in light.

LOUIS ZUKOFSKY:

All Wise

Footprint and eye fringe
Shake off snow—
All wise
Flinging.

Pupil and fingers
Draw the bow—
All wise
Singing.

Heartbeat and feathers
Sow birds so—
All wise
Ringing.

Alba (1952)

In sleep where all that's past goes on—
A dawn loves more than sleep.
Clear as leaves of spring.

Loves no less, wintering,
Greener than summer goes—
A sleep gainsays the dawn.

Spooks' Sabbath, Five Bowings

I *spiccato*

There was the mechanicalism
of the ice cream scooper,
the Malayan violinist
more expressive than any Caucasian
as he melted into his Schumann
so for his part hard objects
became the buttocks of the heart.

II *martelé*

No sins or
Faux pas
Disturb a *repas*
À l'Hôtel
The
Hotel Windsor.

Day begins or
Ends
The knee bends
To the rustle
Of cards
At the Windsor.

Never a fiesta—
A siesta
Has emptied
All the chairs
Of sins or
Faux pas
At the Windsor.

III *grand détaché*

The night
the skunk
stank up
Adirondack
"the village beautiful"
Celia dreamt
of renting
outhouses
under
compunction
and beneath
contempt
while Louis
with usual
curiosity
as to *real*
estate
hung round
to look into
all, and
at last
two
to see
which
was
the better
for the
violinists'
trills
above
around
about—
brooked by
an inexorable Teacher
swayed
to the
Rode.

IV *collé*

When *The Mill*
the artists colony
burnt down
we rushed
to its
end of town
to ask
"How did it happen?
Was anybody hurt?"
"No, the tank blew up
on my competitor—
my best friend—
there was no stopcock
and in this heat the oil—"
(sculptors had saved some
underwear
upon the pines)
said George, fifteen,
with teeth,
crew-cut black hair,
in his "father's truck"—
stopping on a rival
call.

V *staccato*

Said Susan, dear Susan
"I could faint
but I'll paint,
my relations
who bought a cottáge here
are all
drinking *potage*."

Then Eva the diva
sang over-all, ah
what is
the matter?

Poor good people yet so strange
I would say
with Shakespeare
they make *mows*
for *hellos*. Not so?
An effervescence makes them retreat,
hello, a mew, never stop, go—
they pass out
on the street
I travel everywhere,
Italy — I make friends
with whole villages
all are happy, all live,
live!
I live here too
never mind,
I sing, I eat, I dress
and grow fatter.

Old

"More do I love cold
than do I hate warm."
If what the child hear
sound old, neither does
cold hate warm.
The more if less love
may do hate out
of its charm.

ROBERT MARTIN ADAMS:

Now That My Ladder's Gone —
Yeats Without Myth

The need of modern poets for a myth or tradition which shall unify and order the modern experience is a commonplace of contemporary criticism. Not only modern poets, and not only poets, are said to require myth as a sort of scaffolding for their work; one is given to understand that literary artists in every genre and of every age have experienced the need. Dante is generally accepted as the happy example of a poet who possessed in Christian tradition, and specifically in the work of Thomas Aquinas, a readymade myth, tradition, or intellectual scaffold, with which his poetry could form an organic and integral connection. Modern poets, on the other hand, are said to be faced with the unhappy alternatives of reporting the infinitely varied, perpetually identical fact of chaos; or of inventing and expounding as they go along the myths by which they choose to work. In electing the latter alternative, they assume a double function, of poet and philosopher, of creator and explorer, which constitutes either a major peril or a major incitement (as one chooses) to literary achievement. Of those that have elected this double role, William Butler Yeats is given special rank as the most radical and successful innovator in the business of constructing a private mythology.*

Yeats himself, in a letter to his father dated 1917, described his religious system as a means of providing for his poetry a new framework and new patterns; and Leo Africanus, a spirit-creature who dictated a good deal of *A Vision* to Mrs. Yeats, was no less explicit. "We have come to give you metaphors for your poetry," he said. These alone are formidable authorities; and, as noted above, they have been widely echoed. But some misgivings have lately arisen. Miss Vivienne Koch, whose volume is the most recent afield, denies very largely the relevance of the system outlined in *A Vision,* as far as the

* The views outlined in my first paragraph have been so often expressed as to render a strict accounting of them nothing less than a bibliography of modern criticism. The basic approach to Yeats may be traced in the Hall and Steinmann anthology, *The Permanence of Yeats,* as well as in books by MacNeice, Jeffares, Ure, Ellman, Stauffer, and Koch. A full-scale discussion of myth is that of Richard Chase (*Quest for Myth,* 1949).

later poems are concerned, and seems to have proved a good many of her points. The philosophy is not needed to read poems like "The Wild Old Wicked Man" or "The Three Bushes." It was not particularly in Yeats' mind when he wrote these poems; and he does not use the typical symbols, or "metaphors," which are the hallmarks of the system — gyres, masks, anti-masks, wheels, cycles, and phases. When he does use them in the later poetry, as for instance in "The Gyres," critical opinion seems to be a good deal puzzled by them. Mr. Stauffer says, for example, that the gyres symbolize "intellect, art, and age." Miss Koch associates them with "process"; Ellmann, following Yeats himself, suggests so many connections with objectivity and subjectivity, beauty and truth, fact and value, particular and universal, quality and quantity, man and *Daimon,* the living and the dead, sexual symbolism, Kabbalistic lore, and Solomon's Seal, as to rob the gyres of any particular significance in any particular context. The problem isn't lack of content; the symbol "gyre" has too many possible contents to be anything but a lumber-room of undirected association. Its failure to communicate is the more striking because the basic human meaning of the particular poem is perfectly clear. If there are any critical confusions regarding "The Gyres" (for example, as to the identity of Old Rocky Face, whom Mr. Jeffares is seduced into supposing the Jew from Shelley's *Hellas*), they come from the attempt to intellectualize what is basically very simple. And in a poem like "The Circus Animals' Desertion," of which Miss Koch makes (curiously) no use at all, Yeats specifically repudiates not only the various mythical systems of his career, but the personages and masks which he has had occasion to assume in fulfillment of the system.

> These masterful images because complete
> Grew in pure mind, but out of what began ?
> A mound of refuse or the sweepings of a street,
> Old kettles, old bottles, and a broken can,
> Old iron, old bones, old rags, that raving slut
> Who keeps the till. Now that my ladder's gone
> I must lie down where all the ladders start
> In the foul rag-and-bone shop of the heart.

An independent knowledge of Yeats' philosophy is not, in fact, necessary for the appreciation of very many of Yeats' poems; of those generally accounted great, only a handful really demand that we look into *A Vision,* and defy our comprehension of their form till we have done so. A poem like "Sailing to Byzantium" may surprise us with

an occasional phrase in the jargon — "perne in a gyre," for instance, shocks us with its cracked, mechanical note. But Yeats was generally craftsman enough to conceal the prosthetic devices on which his poetry supported itself, at least to the point where they did not cry their nature aloud.

But if the poems are not, in general, abjectly helpless without the philosophy, how much does the philosophy contribute to them? Additional connotations, no doubt, under all circumstances; for one who has read Yeats, a gyre is never again a simple gyre, and the phases of the moon have a permanent queerness about them. But is there anything more to the philosophy's contribution than queerness? Certainly the sort of translation which consists merely of transposing poetry into jargon, or of reading the poetry while remaining simultaneously aware of the "additional connotations" of the jargon, does not represent much more than a feat of virtuosity. Undoubtedly, one is more impressed by images, like those of tower and cavern, Byzantium, and golden birds, when he is aware of the many meanings that Yeats crowded into them. But whether this "packed" effect is significant in any way, whether the additional levels of meaning reinforce or distract the reader's attention, is a major question. One may also ask, secondarily, whether the packed effect is legitimately achieved by publication of a philosophy which aims chiefly at packing images. The poet might quite as sensibly, and rather more economically, append to each symbol a footnote, listing the connotations he wishes us to festoon about it. And if there is something to be gained by this procedure, in richness, there is also a good deal to be lost, in cumbersomeness — not to speak of the latent irritation which rises from a pronounced disparity between what a poet says he intends and the vehicle through which he offers to accomplish it.

The philosophy is, in short, a treacherous intermediary between poem and reader; it is just hazy enough to tangle the busy, hazy mind in its intricacies, but not solid enough in its referents to provide any secure resting place. Whatever reality they had for Yeats himself, the spiritual machineries of *A Vision* are intolerable as taught machines; and Yeats himself, aware of the difficulties, concluded his philosophical statement with the advice, "all these symbols can be thought of as the symbols of the relations of men and women and the birth of children . . . all the symbolism of this book applies to begetting and birth, for all things are a single form which has divided and multiplied in time and place." In other words, behind the cycles of the moon,

the Platonic year, the events of history, and the twenty-six-fold personality, is a simple human pattern.

Looking at the matter with reader's eyes, I think we will feel that one not only may but must take this view of the system. If Yeats' philosophy is mere empty nonsense (something I don't for a moment believe), the poems which adumbrate it are nonsense too, though perhaps beautiful nonsense. To hail Yeats for having made explicit the modern protest against mythlessness, while reserving one's opinion of the substitute myth he created as total nonsense, is a left-handed piece of graciousness; and it doesn't lead us very far toward the poetry, which never deals directly with mythlessness as an experience. As protest, any form of behavior is justified; ancestor-worship, bombs in public squares, and nervous tics may all be protests, and as protests would all be equally valid. But unless we can believe in a poet's philosophy, if not as an actual, at least as a potential arrangement of experience, it is not much more than a hindrance to us. Yeats' philosophy may be taken as a harmless eccentricity, and it may also be made to stand like a veil between the poetry and its experience. But it may serve equally well to relate the poetry to a human experience, a human potential. To do so, it must be translated into significant, if not necessarily important human statements. One's aim in undertaking such a translation would be to salvage the poetry from the jargon, in order to relate it to something more significant. Even if the only alternative to nonsense is commonplace, commonplace at least offers a basis for dramatic contrast and construction. So that the searching out of commonplace may seem worthwhile if one bears in mind a condition and an alternative. The condition is that one isn't trying to find an equivalent for the poem, but a referent-structure to correspond with its structure as an artifact. The alternative is to accept the poem as a nonsense-jingle without referents — as a set of symbols which either symbolize nothing, or refer only to a second set of symbols which refer to nothing. Yeats, who prided himself on his "public speech," would scarcely be flattered at being taken at this level, and criticism owes him an effort at postponing the indignity.

II

Of the better-known poems, "Byzantium" certainly presents the sharpest challenge to the act of humanistic interpretation, partly because it is so largely written in the symbols of the system, partly because the system itself doesn't seem to use some of these symbols

to relate to anything very clear outside of itself or the poetry, partly because the central message of the poem has generally seemed a direct repudiation of human experience. Perhaps, by looking at the things this poem says and some of the ways in which it seems to say them, we can manage to see through and around the system, with a frank eye to rendering it dispensible by making the poem's direct human meaning stronger. Though we cannot pretend that the philosophy doesn't exist, we may be able to minimize it, to explore the poetry's ability to get around or away from it. To save quotation, this tour of inspection will presume that the text of the poem is handy for comparison.

"Byzantium" opens with a strict, abrupt grammar, a violent image followed by a relatively concrete factual statement; both, however, are short phrases in which verb is tightly linked to subject, and two blunt, complete statements of recession and departure are made. A sort of relation between the "unpurged images of day" and the "Emperor's drunken soldiery" is implied by the common quality of grossness; but what exactly "images" are the poet leaves imprecise. A third short phrase ("night resonance recedes") repeats the first verb, a second subject is attached to it ("night walker's song"), and then, with deliberate casualness, an adverb phrase ("after great cathedral gong") which could refer to any or all of the preceding verbs, probably all. For the great cathedral gong, as we look backward in the poem at its receding resonance, leads thought back to the first receding of the poem. Our minds are asked to recede from day, also from night; but day and night may be taken here not as opposites but as complements. For the receding is away from earth, with its alternate day and night; from above, in the starlit or moonlit dome (again the alternative acts as a form of aggregation, as well as implying the permanent darkness of the upper atmosphere) — from the heaven's vault, we can see in perspective what is merely human. "All mere complexities" carries an implication that there is in some condition a resolution of complexities without which one's destiny is only partially fulfilled. The poem promises in this first stanza to arrogate to itself a wider vision than that of humanity, a vision which could include the perspective of either art or death or both, but which is in any case the product of astronomical distance. "Disdains" must therefore carry the force, secondarily of contempt or scorn, perhaps projected, but primarily of looking down from a height at something immeasurably below one, as the first "That" of "Sailing to Byzantium" sets everyday life at an immense distance.

Stanza 2 presents the poet's vision within the new sphere. What he sees has the form of a man; but this is the least of it, it is more like a ghost than a man and more like an image than either. The logic of the triple presentation is the logic of approach; from one error the mind leaps to a contrary error, concluding in the just middle with the word "image," which, taken in conjunction with the first line, now begins to take on meaning for us. An image is of course a figment of the imagination; but it is also a picture or figure with substance, and in fact the sort of symbol in which "Byzantium" itself is written — neither pure abstraction nor simply material. The explanation which "For" (line 3) implies is that in Hades (which is neither Hell nor Heaven but afterlife or otherlife) the experiences of physical life ("the winding path") may be unwound from man's soul as from a bobbin; and when thus unwound by death or ecstasy, man will lose the complex motion of the spindle and achieve the simplicity of rotating in a single direction on a single axis. Moreover, a purged image of this sort, half material and half spiritual, half alive and half dead, may summon other images — beget them. Whether it is art or afterlife to which the poet is making reference here doesn't really matter as yet; it is another mode of existence than the physical, within which another mode of creation or re-creation prevails; and the poet, as he pauses a moment to survey and define its character, resolves the contradiction with the words, "I call it death-in-life and life-in-death." "I call it" marks this terminology as hyperbolical, an attribution of the poet's; and that he is really thinking of the esthetic sphere as contrasted with the everyday is made clear by the next stanza.

For the breathless mouths which the image of man summons, forges, or begets in the esthetic sphere are at once described in Stanza 3 as "miracle, bird, or golden handiwork," a triple alternative which parallels in reverse order that of Stanza 2. These are the golden singing birds of the Byzantine emperors, a context which returns us to the Emperor mentioned in Stanza 1, line 2; their social character prepares us for the discovery, already suggested at the end of Stanza 2, that the withdrawal of Stanza 1 was purely a mental recession, that in fact we are still on the floor of the Emperor's palace, though in a new sphere of mental activity. The golden birds offer now an unnatural combination of sensual and spiritual appeal — hence are more a miracle than a mere mechanical or physical bird. Such birds of art have two aspects; either they summon the mind to a partaking, or they disdain and scorn it. Their summoning would be like the

crowing of Hades' cocks, an act associated with the golden bough which is the passport to the underworld, and with the crowing of earthly cocks which signalize (as in *Hamlet*) the return of ghosts to their proper sphere. The summoning of the birds associates also to the dark of the moon, when even the reflected light of the sun disappears, and the way of the spirit is lit only by cold astral lights. But the presence of the moon embitters the birds; perhaps because sunlight, even reflected, provides too warm and near a perspective for works of art. But this is a hazard; and the phrase "by the moon embittered" remains a crux on any but the esoteric level. In any event, the "disdains" of Stanza 1 is here reinforced by the golden birds which openly "scorn" common birds and all human or earth-bound complexities. The last line of Stanza 3 echoes the last two of Stanza 1, in token of a general return of the poem, in its latter parts, to themes and images of the first part; as Stanza 4 will open "on the Emperor's pavement," and not within any starlit or moonlit dome — the circle of receding and returning being now complete.

The flames which flit on the Emperor's pavement are, then, at two removes from physical reality; they are the flames begotten of flames, the breathless mouths summoned by a mouth that has no moisture and no breath, the fresh images begotten by images; they are ghostly flames, yielding no heat and obedient to no physical laws. But they can also summon blood-begotten spirits (and the nature of these blood-begotten spirits is sharply contrasted with the flames begotten of flame), so that the movement of Stanza 1 is reversed in Stanza 4; after leaving mere complexities behind in the physical world (Stanza 1), man reappears in Stanza 4, summoned by images begotten of images, and bringing his complexities now to the Emperor's floor. A cycle is achieved, the mind moving from mire, blood, and complexity to image to bird or flame and back again to blood and complexity. "Dying" (line 6), though it has the additional connotation of physical death or entrancement, is merely a settling into the form of the dance; and agony, though it implies anguish, has also the overtones of struggle and conflict *(agon)*. Thus the experience of art is fitted into a recurrent cycle in the endless alternate movement of the mind from will to idea and back to will.

The last stanza opens with an image of dolphins, one new image in that series of images begotten by other images with which the stanzas of the poem begin, and which lead us forward from images to golden birds to flames to dolphins. But like the grammar of the stanza, the logic of the image itself is unstrung and loosened; the

dolphin's element is mire and blood and this element the blood-begotten spirits are said to be astraddle. They straddle, that is, not only the dolphin but the two alternating spheres, air and sea, through which the dolphin leaps. The circle-cycle of earth-image-firebird-earth begets the dolphin-cycle of successive arcs in sea and air which complicates the entire cycle-concept into that of a dance. "Spirit after spirit" sets the dance in time, as "the smithies break the flood" sets the norm or surface of the artistic experience in the fury and the mire of human blood *(Nacheinander* and *Nebeneinander).* It is from this element that the dolphins leap and to it that they return. But in the dance the structure of discourse, which has been at war all along with the begetting of images, finally succumbs, and the poem dissolves into a dance or trance which is, in either aspect, an act of pure contemplation, a stasis. The dolphins as they leap from the mire and blood become smithies for the creation of golden birds, and the hard, smooth anvils of the smithies, where feeling is given shape, are equated to marbles of the dancing floor. The pattern "breaks" bitter furies of complexity; and the word "break," which seems to mean merely "interrupt" in line 2, adds in line 5 the connotations of "resolve" or "purify." The grammar of these statements is much relaxed; the marbles of the dancing floor may be supposed to break ("purify") not only "bitter furies of complexity" in line 5 but also "that dolphin-torn, that gong-tormented sea" in line 8; and on these terms, lines 6 and 7 are an interjection. But the "images" of line 6 may also be in apposition with either "the marbles of the dancing floor" or "the bitter furies of complexity" as the object of "break." The former is the more likely on logical grounds; either reading, however, leaves the last line without grammatical connection. Lack of this connection isn't by any means fatal; return to the dolphin and the gong, with the implied equating of the two as forces which torment while purifying our complexities, fulfills the poem adequately. In any case, whether one leaves the "images" of line 6 or the "sea" of line 8 without grammatical support, there clearly isn't enough to go around; and thus the interjection (if such it is) of lines 6 and 7 may be justified, for the process of begetting which it describes results in the fracture of grammar and logic which it exemplifies.

The progress of the poem is from a sort of "receding" which represents departure from and positive disdain of mere complexities to the vision that includes and comprehends a perpetual struggle between the esthetic forging of one's soul and the formless salt vitality of the ocean, which is womb and complexity and physical existence.

"Byzantium" is a poem about the process of writing a poem; also about a sort of poetry, perhaps about poetry in general; surely about formality and complexity, spirit and flesh, life and death, and some of the relations between them. The position it takes is that human life may include a more-than-human point of view as part of its own strenuous pattern. And to take the poem at this primary estimate, though one need not exclude the overtones which the poem still undeniably possesses, of the Platonic year and the 28 stages of history and the 26 phases of human personality, is to give it a more general human significance than can be attained through the mechanics of an abstract verbal system.

III

The fact is that the "necessity of a mythology" so much advanced in connection with modern poetry may refer either to a social necessity, felt so far as poetry is considered communication; or to a personal necessity felt by the poet alone, to give significant structure and form to his poetry. The personal necessity seems to have predominated in Yeats' own mind; "the mythology of *A Vision,*" says Mr. Ure, "gave him what he desired — a sense of power, a sense of order, the revelation of a secret knowledge and metaphors for his poetry." These, it will be noted, are all personal psychological rather than public communicative values.

But the public and the private necessities, though distinct, are by no means independent of one another. Only a very special temperament can indefinitely maintain, in the teeth of the world's disbelief, and in the absence of even the simplest tools for converting that disbelief, a conviction of significant understanding. What is the proof of significance in an idea, if not its ability to control other minds? Sooner or later, failure to communicate and convince must react upon the ability of the poet to believe in his own structure. Thus the impossibility of a communicative mythology, which the poets so much desire and of which they envy Dante the possession, may have the most serious consequences, the last of which is necessarily the extinction of creative letters. But we are still a long way from last consequences. The most one can say is that a great number of myths have, visibly, broken down under the criticism of science; and Western society, if it possesses a common myth or mythology, does not yet seem (or no longer seems) to be aware of the fact. But even though we are condemned as social beings to mythlessness, and though the reaction of this fact on our private needs is inevitable, still there is a

last trick to postpone the inevitability, which we may learn from Yeats. The myths will not serve as pegs to hang poetry on; but poetry may, at a price, be made to serve as a peg for supporting myth. In terms of communication, a myth which depends on a poem is doubtless absurd. But here, as in many other tight squeezes, longest way round is shortest way home; a myth may be necessary to write a poem, which is not only unnecessary but positively detrimental to reading it. This I take to be the case with Yeats; with the proviso that his myth, as elaborated in *A Vision,* had a special transparence which enables and indeed obliges the reader to look through it at the experience beyond. The reasons for which Yeats needed *A Vision* and the special freedoms of his background determined that his ideas should be solid enough to inspire him, but not so substantial as to prove opaque to a reader. When the reader is reading his best, and *A Vision* is serving its function best, one is aware of three things at once, the poetry, the philosophy, and the reality to which they both refer — like an image cast on a rough wall by a projection apparatus. The light which makes both the image and the wall visible and interesting to us is cast by the poetry; and the poetry balances on a perpetual razor's edge between the confidence which produced it and the all-but-explicit failure to communicate that confidence which its wispiness hovers on the verge of confessing. In the last poems, the failure of belief becomes explicit; and the poetry reverts to themes which are more "human" than "philosophical" and sometimes as much animal as human. The failure and revival of desire, madness, lust, pride, rage, and joy are now the poet's topics; he handles them with extraordinarily little philosophic paraphernalia, but with a splendid heroic vitalism, a tragic masculine authority, of which modern literature shows few examples. Yeats in the last poems dramatized not a particular personality but the struggle of all personalities with circumstance. The materials he uses are drawn as directly from his own experience as those of Dante and with as serene a confidence that his poetry will confer on them universal meaning; his poetic lamp burns with a pure, white, unshaded, and uncompromising light.

This particularly stripped vision, this cold capacity to accept and use some elements of experience without the usual rationalizing, ordering trim, is a quality which renders Yeats of particular interest to the modern, mythless mind. For the modern temper, so far as one can generalize on so tenuous a quality, has not been deprived of a myth or failed after enormous efforts to achieve one; it is simply mythless. There is no preliminary demolition to be accomplished, no

area of freedom to establish; one may construct any myth one chooses, and none has more than an individual, personal meaning.

Yeats, when he talked (as in his later years he often did) of "his kind" had reference to the Irish Protestant gentry of whom he was descended — to the people of Swift, Berkeley, Burke, Goldsmith, and Grattan. He defined them, in several striking phrases, as "upstanding men," "bound neither to Cause nor State," as men who "all hated Whiggery," who "found in England an opposite that stung their own thought into expression and made it lucid." The negatives here are in striking preponderance; the men with whom Yeats identifies himself are notably independent of party, system, national, or parochial loyalty. Alienated from one culture and uncongenial to another, they stand apart from both, the objects of spite or admiration, far more than the participants of sympathy. The immediate past of Yeats' own family reflected this pervasive aristocratic alienation. His father, moreover, had carried out the original act of rebellion from the strict domestic and religious disciplines of Victorianism; like Henry James, Yeats never had to rebel against a paternal authority which was particularly tolerant, understanding, and therefore inescapable — like Proteus, or the Great Boyg. As a result, Yeats very early had freedom thrust upon him; he had from the beginning to construct the meaning of his life around experiences, symbols, and traditions which were not imposed from without, but of his own making. One cannot fail to notice the freedom with which, in a poem like "The Tower," he makes use of his own experience — his character Red Hanrahan, his house, his neighbors Mrs. French and Mary Hines, the old bankrupt man, the mountain of his youth, Ben Bulben. These figures are attached to no particular intellectual system or myth; the poet confronts them directly, making use of them to create or evoke what he chooses. He has in effect made them the servants, if not the components, of a "poetic personality." And, in retrospect, this seems always to have been the quality of Yeats' relation to experience, even when he was most elaborately concerned with myth; the myth was, and was intended to be, a transparent guise through which the poet and his readers might approach the creation or experience of his personality.

To say that Yeats takes his place in a tradition which makes much of personality, which finds its central integrating force in the individual temperament, may seem like a paradox. How can a tradition be built from a series of individual idiosyncrasies? A tradition of individualism scarcely seems like a tradition at all. But the paradox is only

apparent. For the habit of standing alone and independent, of dispensing with supports which others feel necessary, and confronting reality with that naked personal integrity which is independent of all codes save the code of honor, may be learned from the example of others. Undeniably, a tradition of individualism will in a sense be a tradition of dispensing with traditions. But even if this is mere paradox, it is far from an empty one. Increasingly, as modern men find themselves alienated from existing myths or traditions, and the prisoners of whatever myths or traditions they can construct for themselves, they will find Yeats' position a comprehensible and necessary one. Indeed, only a personal feud with existence, such as Yeats carried on, could provide grounds for that taut, full, masculine note of tragic rejoicing which he and Dylan Thomas, alone among modern poets, have succeeded in fully sounding. Of course, the self-made mythology, however comprehensible in its functions and even in its dicta, will inevitably suffer, precisely so far as it is self-made and self-limited, from a failure to communicate. And as its formulations grow thinner and more schematic, we may perhaps look for its place to be filled, as happened with Yeats, by the last and lowest common denominator of humanity, animal desire.

Not that I would be understood to say a solitary, sober critical word against sexuality, either in itself or in poetry. But the essential progress of Yeats, unlike his terminology, does not seem idiosyncratic. He was early concerned with the expression of ideas, artistic and national; then with the development of personality, natural and adventitious; and lastly with the facts of animality, *tout court.* To say that the loss of traditions implies the loss of humanity is perhaps too abrupt. After all, the loss isn't complete, we are partly animals, and one ultimate of tragedy as well as delight is undoubtedly physical. But perhaps "The Second Coming" has voiced as forcefully as any other poem of Yeats' the protest against animality and disorder which might be widened and particularized to include as its object the whole of Yeats' "tragic phase":

> Turning and turning in the widening gyre
> The falcon cannot hear the falconer.
> Things fall apart; the centre cannot hold,
> Mere anarchy is loosed upon the world.
> The blood-dimmed tide is loosed, and everywhere
> The ceremony of innocence is drowned,
> The best lack all conviction, while the worst
> Are full of passionate intensity.

Yeats as an old man did not by many means lack passionate intensity; but he drew it precisely from the "blood-dimmed tide," and amid the swirl and foam of world-anarchy is found repeating with orphic intensity that in growing old men lose their sexual powers, and that this loss is for them a frequent matter of regret. One cannot doubt it; one can only note that in "Byzantium" Yeats had for a precious moment seen out into the whole historic chaos of which even senility is but one fragment, looking into time and beyond it to one verge of human potentiality. Future ages, which will have lost not only myth but the nostalgia for myth, will no doubt feel most at home with the *Last Poems;* but if the first half of the 20th century should choose to be represented before posterity as a community of men in time, one apex of their still concentrated, complex, and strenuous selves could only be expressed by "Byzantium."

MELISSA BLAKE:

Partington Cove

Something homely and understandable about pond life.
Things dart, whirl, balance, skim or gently rock.

Not so the ocean's rock pools:
Unknowable, exotic, exquisite creatures yawn
With green velvet mouths
Digest without stomachs
Cling long to become minerals
Clutch to become pale pink extinct volcanoes
Prickle and propel by prickling
Ribbon and feed by being ribbon.
Star shapes, crystal shapes
Live things which in dying turn to lime
Not mould
Creatures which in dying become permanent
Already being cold.

DANIEL CURLEY:

The Night of the Two Wakes

In all my life up until now I have been to two wakes, and they were both in the same night. From the time I was little, I had heard about wakes: so about two o'clock they put down the lid on the coffin and dealt out a hand of cards, and they knocked on the coffin and said, Will you take a hand of cards? but he didn't say anything; then about four o'clock they asked him again and he didn't say anything, so they took him out and stacked him in the corner and dealt the cards at him and asked him if he wanted a drink and he didn't say anything, so they threw a drink at him; and, oh, but he had a breath on him at the funeral and a deck of cards where his prayerbook should have been. I would never even have seen a corpse except that some howling old woman in black dragged me up to my father's casket when he was laid out under his mounds and mounds of flowers.

This night of the two wakes was a night in one of the summers I worked for old man Baker up near Boston. Baker had a restaurant in a small chain that tried for a while to run in competition with Howard Johnson. The poor bastard was going bankrupt on the place. I think he was losing his mind, and I know damn well he was ruining his health, all the time worrying and trying to get along completely without sleep. But he was an old man and we were college kids, and it was almost impossible for us to feel very much for him.

On this particular night we were planning to go to Red Farrell's wake right after work. Business had been slow all night, so we started about midnight to do the work we usually did after we closed up. We washed the floors and cleaned the grills and put away the food in the big icebox. We even went off upstairs one by one to get our showers. We put on clean shirts and drew tomorrow's fresh white pants from the linen room because none of us kept good clothes at the store.

The store was empty when I went and told old man Baker that it was two o'clock. He was standing beside the front door looking out. He looked at his watch and then out at the yard again, and we both held our breath while a car pulled into the yard, but it only turned around and headed back toward Boston. Old man Baker closed the door and locked it and turned off the sign and nodded good night and

went off upstairs to figure the cash although it was a good bet that he'd be asleep with his head on the desk when we got back.

As we went out through the kitchen we took a little of this and a little of that to eat along the way, things we weren't supposed to have: a few almonds, a slice of cold chicken, an orange. Then we were all set to take off for Red Farrell's wake.

Red Farrell was a kid who had worked right along with us in the store. He never was a fast man on the grill, and he couldn't remember more than ten kinds of ice cream. He'd rather sit in the stock room and peel potatoes than work out front, and he'd rather throw half-pint milk bottles at rats than anything. He didn't even know enough to love up the waitresses when they came out to the stock room to grab a quick smoke or to fix their stockings. But everyone liked him, even the girl who was mad at him because she had made every other kid who ever came to work at the store. And then on his day off Red just went under in the middle of the lake without even a yell or anything, and we were going to his wake after work.

As we stood beside the cars for a minute — Billy the Cork, Billy Murph, Bill Johnson, and I together, and Primo the dishwasher alone beside his old Chevvy — Bill Johnson said, "There he is already." We all looked up and saw old man Baker sleeping with his head on the desk up in the office. Bill Johnson, who was a kind of assistant manager and who would have to figure the cash if Baker didn't, threw a handful of pebbles against the screen, and Baker sat up quickly and we could see his lips moving and his pencil going slowly down the long register tape.

We were just going to get into the car when Primo said to me, "Thanks for helping me in the kitchen." When we had our own work pretty well in hand, Johnson had sent me out to help Primo finish up on the dishes.

"That's OK," I said.

"We all help each other here," Johnson said. Primo was the one who came to work after Red died. The old dishwasher moved out front with us to take Red's place, and the new man became the dishwasher. That was our way. We had all come in as dishwashers, and I for one still liked to get out back and take off my shirt and tie and go to work on the old machine.

"I didn't want to be held up tonight," Primo said.

I'm not good at noticing things, but even I could tell he was trying to say something. "How come?" I said.

"My mother's wake," he said.

"You should have stayed out," Johnson said.

"If it wasn't a new job I would," he said.

"We would have covered for you," I said.

"Thanks anyway," Primo said. He started to get into his car. The rest of us looked at each other. Since we had made up our minds to go to a wake anyway, it was an easy matter to make it two. Primo told us to tail him through the tunnel to East Boston.

Billy the Cork had a hard time tailing Primo because Primo just took off and never looked back. Even when he squeaked through a red light that caught us, he didn't slow down, and it was only luck that we caught him at the tunnel. It wasn't too far from there to his house, but there were so many twists and turns down narrow dirty streets that I was beginning to wonder how we'd ever get out again, especially with Billy the Cork all the time driving with one hand and eating raw frankfurts he had brought along in his pocket. Finally we followed around a corner that Primo had taken just as fast as any other, and we were just in time to see him jump out of his car and cross the sidewalk and dive into the doorway of a tenement. Billy the Cork wasn't able to stop until we were half way up the block. Then we got out and started to go back.

"What a wild man," Billy the Cork said.

"You'd think he didn't want us," Bill Johnson said. We all stopped in front of the door. "I don't want to go in if he don't want us," Bill said.

"We come quite a ways," Billy the Cork said.

"If they don't want us we better go back," I said.

"Maybe he just went in to say we were coming," Billy Murph said. "Strangers and all."

"Maybe," I said. So we went up to the door and opened it. There was a long flight of stairs going right up from the door, and there was no one in sight, and there was no sound at all from upstairs although by the light on the wall up there we could tell the door was open. Then my big feet kicked over a milk bottle. It didn't break but there was a lot of noise.

"It's no good pretending we aren't here now," Johnson said and started up the stairs. The rest of us followed along.

At the top of the stairs we hesitated again. We could see part of a room in which there were no people but only rows of folding chairs arranged as if someone were going to give a speech or show colored slides. Even out in the hall I could smell the suffocating stink of the flowers. "This is the place all right," I said.

"But is it the place for us?" Billy the Cork said. "It's weird." We could hear men crying in another room, saying, Mama, Mama, and one of them every once in a while saying, Papa, you've got to be strong, and both crying and saying, Mama, Mama.

We all looked at each other and Billy the Cork said again, "Is it the place for us?" Nobody paid any attention to him. But a little dog came out and began barking like crazy. Still nobody came out to see what the matter was. Billy the Cork gave the dog the last of his frankfurt, and the dog crawled away under a chair to eat it. We stepped into the room, keeping close together and moving very slowly.

The room wasn't completely empty. There was an old man sleeping in one of the folding chairs in the back of the room. He was turned sideways and rested his head on his arms on the back of the chair. He had a fierce growth of white beard and looked as if he hadn't moved out of the chair for three days. He was wearing a grey coat sweater over a white shirt that was buttoned but had neither collar nor tie. In the front of the room there was a doorway that gave onto a limitless bank of flowers. In the midst of the flowers a candle was burning, and we all veered toward it, walking softly on the threadbare carpet with its faded roses.

This room too seemed at first to be empty except for the masses of flowers — whew — and the casket, but the Mama, Papa, Mama crying was louder here, and then we could see Primo in his dirty white pants kneeling before a small old man who was sitting in a little alcove at the end of the room across from the casket. Billy the Cork and Billy Murph stepped up to the casket and knelt, blessing themselves and glancing into the casket at the same time. Then they bowed their heads and remained motionless.

"What am I supposed to do?" Bill Johnson said in my ear.

"Just go up and take a look," I said. "Kneel on the foot stool. Bow your head and count a hundred slow."

"That all?"

"Keep your eyes open," I said. "That's all I'll be doing." I was trying to avoid looking at Primo and his father, and I was trying not to read the cards on the flowers, and I was trying not to seem to watch the two Billys praying, but they were taking so long about it that I looked back at them. "Better make it a hundred and fifty," I said to Bill. The two Billys blessed themselves together and stood up together. Bill and I stepped forward. I got down all right, but you could tell that Johnson wasn't used to kneeling because his knee

hit with a terrible thump. Even in the candle light I could see how red his face was, and I had all I could do to keep from laughing.

The woman in the casket was more or less what I expected Primo's mama to be. She was fat. Her hair was still black. A rosary spilled over her stumpy fingers. Her face was painted so that she looked like a whore, but no amount of paint could hide the heavy mustache and the pockmarks. I bowed my head and began to count slowly.

When we stood up and started back toward the two Billys, Primo left his father and came toward us. He shook hands silently with all of us, starting with Bill Johnson. "Will you speak to my father?" Primo said. We shuffled uncomfortably and Primo turned his back on us and walked toward his father. We followed. "Papa," Primo said, "this is Mr. Johnson from the restaurant and some of the other boys who work there."

The old man sat up straight in his chair and looked sharply at us. "Mr. Johnson?" he said and started to struggle out of the chair.

"Don't get up, please, sir," Bill Johnson said. "We only want to express our sympathy."

"And the sympathy of everyone at the store," Billy Murph said.

"Mr. Baker wants you to know how very sorry he is he couldn't come over with us," Billy the Cork said.

"We never knew her," I said, "but we can tell she was a fine woman."

"Only a fine woman could have brought up such a fine hard-working son as Primo," Bill Johnson said. That was a relief to me because although I knew we had to say she was a fine woman, I couldn't think of anything fine to say about her — the rouged face, the pockmarks, the mustache.

"Only a fine woman would have so many friends to send her such fine flowers," Billy Murph said.

"Only a fine woman would be missed so by her little dog," Billy the Cork said.

The old man began to weep large tears, and he covered his face with his hands. "Oh, Mama, Mama, Mama," he said.

"Papa, Papa, you've got to be strong," Primo said.

"You have a fine son to comfort you," Bill Johnson said.

"That's a blessing," Billy Murph said.

"And you've got the girls to be strong for," Primo said. The old man had stopped crying. Primo suddenly shouted, "Mama, Mama, Mama," and buried his head in his father's lap. The old man bent over him and cried with him.

We all looked at each other and started to leave. "Maybe we should wait to say goodbye to Primo," Billy Murph said. We sat down in the folding chairs in the outer room, but we had hardly settled ourselves when we heard women's shoes banging on the stairs.

"Let's be getting out of here," I said. We broke for the door and reached it just as two girls were about to come in. They stopped and we stopped. They must have been the sisters all right though God knows where they were coming from at that hour. They wore tight black dresses and black shoes and stockings. Their black hair was loose. They had no jewelry or make-up. Their faces were quiet and sad. They were striking women. After the slightest of hesitations they came in and nodded gravely as they passed us, but once they were inside the room they broke into an awkward graceful feminine run. As they entered the other room they turned to run toward their father. It was hard to tell if they looked back at us.

"Perhaps we should still wait," Billy the Cork said.

Then in the other room the girls began hysterically without any buildup, Papa, Papa, and the men began, Mama, Mama.

"Let's get the hell out of here," I said.

"Amen," Bill Johnson said.

We went back to the car and cruised around a bit looking for a bar, but everything was shut tight by then. "At a proper Irish wake we'll get whiskey," Billy the Cork said.

"That's right," Billy Murph said, "and none of that crazy yelling. Don't worry, Bill, there won't be anything like that."

"I'm not worrying," Johnson said.

"If there's one thing the Irish know, it's how to run a wake," Billy the Cork said, and he took us the shortest way to Red Farrell's house.

Red's house wasn't very far from the store. It was on a quiet back street in a suburban town. The houses were all larger than they have been built for a good while now, but each was a one-family house set close to the street with a small lawn and just enough room on either side to back in a coal truck.

Even before we were set to ring the bell, the door was opened for us by a large man perhaps ten years older than any of us. He was dressed in a good dark suit and looked very fresh despite the fact that it was already nearly four o'clock. "We're from the store," Bill Johnson said while the rest of us were trying to get into the right positions and get our faces fixed right.

"I'm Red's brother," the man said. He shook hands with Johnson

and gently urged him through the door and turned him left into a parlor. To each of us as we passed he said, "I'm Red's brother," and as we mumbled our names he passed us in and turned us firmly left.

There weren't many flowers but there were enough for a great stink. As Johnson and I walked toward the casket I looked slyly for flowers with our card on them, but I couldn't see any. We knelt together quietly, and as I blessed myself I felt his arm moving beside me. I looked quickly at him and saw him finishing a highly professional sign of the cross. Then I looked at Red.

Red was pale as death and very waxy-looking — there was a suffocating blanket of pinks right under my nose. He didn't look like anybody who would care about throwing bottles at rats or turn his head away while a waitress fixed her stocking. He didn't look good to me at all. I bowed my head and heard Johnson whisper, "Two hundred."

"Three hundred," I whispered, "three hundred for old Red." I started off with an Our Father, counting the words on my fingers as I said them. But51 deliver52 us53 from54 evil55. Amen56. 57 thousand, 58 thousand, 59 thousand, 60 thousand. On the second hundred I tried a Hail Mary just for variety, and that came out to 42. On the third hundred I said them one after the other, and they added up almost exactly right: hour94 of95 our96 death97. Amen98. 99 thousand, one hundred thousand.

I raised my head just a trifle and saw out of the corner of my eye that Johnson was raising his too. He moved his arm beside me and as I felt it move I made the sign of the cross with him. We stood up together and as we stepped away from the casket, Billy the Cork and Billy Murph stepped up like one man. I wanted to take a quick look around for our flowers and keep tabs on how long the two Billys took with their prayers for Red, but the brother took us both by the arm and led us out of the room.

"A tragic thing," Johnson said as we walked through the dining room.

"Really tragic," the brother said. He continued to grip our arms and urge us along. "He had just about decided he had a vocation, you know, and now this. Really tragic."

"Mr. Baker wants you to know how really sorry he is he couldn't come over with us," I said.

"Some girls from the store were over earlier tonight," the brother said. "They were fine girls."

"He was a fine boy," Johnson said.

"Only a fine boy would be missed like that by girls like those," I said.

"How are the parents taking it?" Johnson said.

The brother stopped us at the door to the kitchen. "Hard," he said. "Very hard. He was the baby, you know, and with a vocation too. You boys know how it is for the old people to have a son with a vocation."

"That's hard," I said.

"Through the mercy of God they're sleeping at last," he said.

"The mercy of God," Johnson said.

I nodded gravely and the brother shoved us into the kitchen. "I'll get you a beer," he said and went to the refrigerator.

There were three old men in shirtsleeves sitting at a bare kitchen table, drinking beer and playing twenty-one. Only the one facing the door looked up as we came in. The other two could tell from his face that we weren't worth looking at. "Hit me," one of the men said. The dealer dealt him a card. The man knocked on the table with his knuckles, and the dealer dealt him another card. "I'm good," the old man said.

The dealer turned up his cards and studied them, and he studied the other hands on the table. He salted his beer and dealt himself one card. "I'll pay nineteen," the old man said. He ran his finger inside the neck band of his shirt, which was fastened by a gold stud but had neither collar nor tie.

The brother brought back two cans of beer with little knobs of foam standing up from the punched holes. We took the beer gratefully because it had already been a long night and a lot of death. We lifted our cans toward him and drank. "Wait here," he whispered, "I'll go get the others."

Johnson and I sat down in some chairs against the wall away from the table. The beer was cold. The room was cool — and quiet, too, except for the murmured ritual of the game. The white curtains blew from the window, and the open door rattled softly at its hook. A vine scraped lightly at a shutter. The soft night noises and the freshness of roses filled the room. Even the first few sips of beer made me sleepy.

Johnson got up from his chair and walked over to the table. He reached for the salt and lost his balance, bumping heavily against the table. The old men stood up quickly. Their quick hands grabbed their beer so that none spilled except a little of Johnson's. He reached again for the salt and salted his beer. He came back toward me with

the dark wet spots on his shirt and pants. The old men sat down again. They hadn't looked at him. They went back to drinking and watching and knocking.

Only the one facing the door looked up when the two Billys came in. The other two looked at him, and then they all looked back at their cards. The brother went to the refrigerator, and the two Billys sat down in the row of chairs with us. I hadn't been able to keep a very accurate count on them what with interruptions and forgetting which hundred I was working on, but they must have taken close to a thousand, the show-offs.

The brother brought us all beer. We lifted our cans toward him, but he pointed through the dining room. We all turned in our chairs and lifted our cans again. "Red," Billy the Cork said, and we all said, "Red." The brother's jaw was stuck way out, and his eyes were beginning to shine moistly. He turned to the refrigerator to get beer for the card players. He filled their glasses without speaking to them, nor they to him. Even between hands they acted as if he wasn't there. One of the old men picked up his box of matches to light his pipe, but the box was empty. All the old men fumbled in their pants pockets and in the pockets of their sweaters, which hung over the backs of their chairs, while the brother went and got fresh boxes for everyone. The old men all lighted their pipes and went on playing.

"Let's get out of here," Johnson whispered to me.

"We'll have to wait," I said.

Johnson turned to Billy the Cork and whispered, "Let's get the hell out of here."

"The beer is cold," Billy the Cork said.

And Billy Murph leaned over and said, "Where else will you get beer at this hour?"

"I've had it," Johnson said. "I want to get some sleep."

"Stick around," Billy the Cork said.

"See how the Kerrymen drink their beer and stay awake," Billy Murph said.

"How about Galway?" I said. "How about that?"

"Galway?" Billy the Cork said. "So now it's Galway with you. I've heard you say different."

"God damn the counties of Ireland," Johnson said. One of the card players rapped loudly on the table. "Sorry," Johnson said, turning a bright red.

"Yes, now it's Galway," I said. "Tonight in this house for Red it's Galway."

"Out of respect for Red," Billy Murph said.

"Yes, out of respect for Red," Billy the Cork said, "but we don't have to respect you."

"Respect Red, respect Galway, respect me," I said. "All or nothing." The card players weren't watching us, but I was watching them. Our voices had got quite loud, but the card players went on playing slowly and knocking softly.

"Hold on, hold on," the brother said. He was opening beer cans furiously and ran with them to us.

"They want a fight," I said. I drank off half the new can of beer.

"Now look," Billy the Cork said. He bobbed right up in front of me and shoved his face up into my face. "That's not so and you know it, but I'm damned if anyone can make me say that Kerrymen don't want a fight, right, Murph?"

"Right," Billy Murph said.

"See," the brother said, "no one wants a fight. Drink up, boys."

"Kerrymen always want a fight," Billy the Cork said, "right, Murph?"

"Right."

"By God, I want a fight for Galway," I said. We were yelling now.

"Boys, boys," the brother said. "This is a quiet neighborhood."

"Not any more," Johnson said.

"Remember the parents," the brother said.

"Right," Murph whispered.

"I'll fight you," I whispered. "Step out that door."

"The first one that makes a noise is an Englishman," Billy the Cork said.

"Drink up, drink up," the brother said, but we were all out the door by then.

We found ourselves in a grassy back yard overlooked by the windows of at least three houses. I arranged myself against the side of the house, and they stood before me, one a little to either side. I looked at all the dark windows and tightly shut doors. The night was so quiet that I heard one of the players rap on the table. I was about to issue my challenge, but mindful of the restriction of silence I just held out my arms. They came at me cautiously.

None of us made any attempt to strike a blow. It wasn't that kind of a fight. We just came together and grappled. For a long time it was my right arm against Billy Murph and my left arm against Billy the Cork. They turned me from the side of the house and pushed

me around pretty much, but it was slow work for them because I was a little bigger than the one and half a foot bigger than the other. We waltzed twice around the yard in slow time. Sometimes my feet were off the ground. I was turning all the time because of the stronger pressure Billy Murph could apply to one side. Then they worked me into the middle of the grass and, as if they had done it many times before, each put a leg behind me and pushed.

The fall knocked the breath out of me, and I just lay still for a while, and they lay on me, their arms locked around my arms and their legs around my legs. And then by God I stood up. Oh, I was a giant. As I came up they were hanging all over me like hounds on a bear, and I shook Billy the Cork off, and I pushed Billy Murph over him, and I piled the one on the other and jumped on top, and I rested.

I had been aware during the last of the fight of sirens fading in from the distance, but it was like crowds shouting and cheering, and it urged me on. Then as I lay on the other two, I heard a car stop in the street. A spot light hit one of the houses in the back. Lights came on in another. I jumped up and Murph was up like a jack-in-the-box. I threw Billy the Cork onto his feet. The whole yard was bright. Men were running in the gravel drive. Someone yelled, "Through here." We just stood.

Johnson was standing on the back steps yelling, "Did you get them? Which way did they go?"

"We had them but they got away," Billy Murph yelled, pointing toward the side of the yard the spot light couldn't hit. As he said it and pointed, a powerful flashlight hit him and he held his pose, all in white pointing off into the night.

"They were all in black," Billy the Cork said. "They'll be hard to find." Two policemen ran past without speaking.

The brother came out and ran half across the yard after the policemen and stopped. The two Billys and I went into the house and took two cans apiece from the refrigerator and an opener from the sink.

"How was it?" the dealer said.

"All Galway," I said. My face hurt when I smiled. My shirt was torn half off. Tomorrow's pants had grass stains at the knees.

"Good boys," the dealer said and dealt the cards.

"Let's get the hell out of here," Johnson said, but by then we were half through the dining room on our way out.

As we were turning into the yard at the store we saw four of the waitresses cutting across the yard to their rooming house. We asked them where the hell they were coming from at that hour, and they

told us they had gone swimming after the wake. We gave them each a can of beer, and then we took them up to the bunk room. Old man Baker was sleeping in his car when we went past, and he was still there an hour and a half later when I came down to open the store for the day. After I gave the girls their breakfast — with large orange juice, which the help wasn't supposed to have — and after they had got out of sight, I squeezed another large orange juice and took it out to old man Baker. It seemed the only decent thing to do.

JOAN WHITE:

The Polished Drive

From the sanitarium
Where lions rage,
The backward beasts have run
To cover of woods' hide

For playing flames are games
Around the Christmas tree,
Eve's corner, ghosts' desert,
And the Chinese sill.

Along the polished drive
Bells are hung
Shaking in the speed
Of hate for this escape,

While monsters mildly glide
Each in his range,
Joined behind a clean
Sheet of hanging rain,

And watch their house afire
Burn the world down
To a charcoal drum
That will never sound.

WARREN CARRIER:

Wallace Stevens' Pagan Vantage

M. D. Zabel, in a rich delineation of the course of Stevens' development (in *The Southern Review,* Winter 1940), said that Stevens conceived of his task as a poet to be: "To make of man himself the instrument of knowledge and the medium of universal value." While this fundamentally correct judgment stands, as I quote it, deprived of its supporting explanation, the argument, really, is the corral of Mr. Zabel's own humanism.

I wonder if we may not conceive of Stevens' man-centered world as more pagan than humanistic, and if we may not accept Stevens' enunciation of his paganism in "Sunday Morning" as unequivocal enough before 1940, and the poetry since as most intelligible within that world view. The problem of Stevens' paganism — since our common definition of paganism is limitedly negative — is a complicated one, and the term itself has become somewhat a simplification of a world view which is deeply complex. Probably within the compass of that view several attitudes may be discerned. Without expatiating on them, or on the larger philosophic background, let me examine one of the typical shorter poems in Stevens' latest book in order to discover the several associated but discrete attitudes at work in the poem — and explicate the poem in such a way as to indicate particularly, if briefly, the nature of what I believe to be Stevens' pagan vantage.

STUDY OF IMAGES I *

It does no good to speak of the big, blue bush
Of day. If the study of his images
Is the study of man, this image of Saturday,

This Italian symbol, this Southern landscape, is like
A waking, as in images we awake,
Within the very object that we seek,

Participants of its being. It is, we are.
He is, we are. Ah, bella! He is, we are,
Within the big, blue bush and its vast shade

* Wallace Stevens, *The Auroras of Autumn,* Knopf, 1950.

At evening and at night. It does no good.
Stop at the terraces of mandolins,
False, faded and yet inextricably there,

The pulse of the object, the heat of the body grown cold
Or cooling in late leaves, not false except
When the image itself is false, a mere desire,

Not faded, if images are all we have.
They can be no more faded than ourselves.
The blood refreshes with its stale demands.

Saturday is "Saturn's day." Saturn, the Roman god of sowing, is an "Italian symbol" of renewal, of that which refreshes with its stale demands. We anticipate in the first stanza the culminating statement of the poem in its last stanza.

The "big, blue bush" is a description of a clear, blue day, and all the day includes; it is the image of the natural world. It is also the image of man who exists in that day and who is made in the image of nature; and nature and the day exist for man.

The poem, then, on the simplest level of paraphrase, is another solipsistic statement, among many by Stevens (and it has been his lifelong delight to make them), that all things are in the image of man, and they exist insofar as man senses them. The day, Saturday, is man's image, the image of his physical being (while the moon of the companion poem, "Study of Images II," is the image of "as if," or the imagination).

The series of condensed and somewhat apostolic statements in stanza three is ambiguous. (We are reminded, possibly, of St. John's definitions: "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God.") We have been dealing with images of the nature of reality and then, astonishingly, these are reduced to pronouns in dogmatic association with the verb "to be." The statements mean to assert existence and dependency; that is, there is a relation of "therefore" implied in the existence of the first person ("It" or "He") and the second ("we") in both statements. The "It" of the first statement refers to the "image of Saturday, this Italian symbol." It has just been observed in stanza two and part of three that the symbol is like a waking within the object that we seek (we are studying man), participants of its being. That is, we discover man in his image of Saturday. And so the poet says: "It" (the image of Saturday) "is," (therefore) "we" (men) "are." This is the study of "man," the generalized idea of man, we are engaged in; we then need to assert

our individualized existence dependent upon the existence of the idea (Platonic) of "man." "He" (man) "is," (ergo) "we" (individual men) "are." Or possibly: "He" (the idea of man) "is," (ergo) "we" (the images of man) "are."

The poem then goes on to establish further the relationships of man in nature or to nature; that is, to place man within the orbit of his day. "Evening" and "night" here are introduced as the specific time because this is probably the time of day (just as it is probably Saturday on which the poet contemplates these concerns); but (just as with Saturday) more is implied. The title of the book from which the poem comes gives us a broader definition of the general sense of time under which these contemplations are made: *The Auroras of Autumn*. In a personal sense, for Stevens, it is the autumnal season of his life; it is the evening of his life within the span of day. This image of time in the poem exceeds the personal, however; it accepts the belief that the poet and his society have their existence in a decadent era; this is a declining man in a declining day. "Night" reminds us, in its season, of the basis of value: "Death is the mother of beauty," Stevens said in "Sunday Morning"; and Stevens contemplates the world with a ubiquitous awareness of death in its season, and according to nature.

The poem, while not an extensive argument for the discarding of the Christian order for a neo-pagan understanding (as is "Sunday Morning"), is nevertheless a poem within Stevens' pagan cosmos. This is not the occasion to present Stevens' arguments totally (they can best be found in "Sunday Morning"), but it should be remarked that his modern paganism accepts transiency and death as inevitable and final and proposes that the beauty and experience of this earth are to be enjoyed as the only beauty and experience we have; and we may most poignantly enjoy or realize them in awareness of transiency and death. Life as we have it is all we have. Man, as a part of and in the image of nature (and nature is in his image), is the center of his universe.

"It does no good," the poet insists, to speak of all this; that is, to rationalize it. As Jehovah, the moralist, looked on His world and said that it was "good," so Stevens, the pagan and aesthetician, looks on his world and exclaims in Italian: "Ah, bella!" And "Ah, bella!" is all Stevens does say, if we think of rationalization of the pattern of nature in Christian or scientific terms.

Stevens' paganism is a world view believed in and lived by; it is founded on experience, as experience can be seen from an aestheticism,

wit, and high sense of style unmatched in our time; and yet it is a view which, in Stevens' understanding, accounts for its own contradictions. It accepts the meaning of Greek beliefs while aware of all that has meaningfully transpired in man's experience since the Greeks; and it uses the trappings (pagan as well as some Christian) much as the later Greeks used them, in their symbolic or poetic sense.

The major metaphor of the poem, "terraces of mandolins," like all other images, is an image of man; specifically, the phrase is equivalent to *cultivated layers of feeling*. Terraces are ordered gardens, layers of cultivated ground, or areas of cultivated life. Here they are human rather than plant. Mandolins, musical instruments ("Music is feeling, then, not sound," Stevens said in "Peter Quince at the Clavier"), represent the capability of feelings. This is the subject of the poem's longest, rather Mallarméan sentence, and I would paraphrase it something like this: Stop at feelings, existing in memory, in funded actuality, in their ordered and refined way; go no further than feelings, for they are the "pulse of the object," "heat of the body" (objects come alive, exist, because we sense them, and they are therefore emanations of ourselves); in this instance they are growing cool — in old age, or in an old age perhaps — faded, perhaps, and yet inextricably there. ("The body dies; the body's beauty lives," Stevens said in "Peter Quince at the Clavier.")

All the poem has led to its last line, a wonderfully epigrammatic, paradoxical discovery. It refers to the image of man himself as a big, blue bush of veins, literally; it adverts to the periodic impulse toward physical renewal; it suggests the core of sacrificial religion; it asserts the continuing existence of man, his images and feelings, even if — and perhaps because — the demands seem stale or merely ritualistic considered by themselves in objectivity of intellect. The blood grows old on the demands on our bodies and returns to the heart where it is refreshed; the figurative heart — the old mandolins, the capability of feelings — is renewed and renews our lives even as our lives make the same old demands. It is an unending wonder. Ah, bella!

Stevens clearly exploits his attitudes in the materials of the poem: hedonism (Stop at the terraces of mandolins, stop at feelings); aestheticism (Ah, bella!); and these within the framework of paganism (Saturn's day, Italian symbol; the human seen in terms of nature or the natural; the natural existing only as human experience; the human as the center of the world) — but none of these is simple.

FRANK HOLWERDA:

Char on Raven's Bench

It must have been an exceedingly informal inquest. The Marshal led six coldly disinterested men up the canyon as far as Raven's Bench and then up the draw to where the charred remains of the cabin lay black in a bed of surrounding brown moss. Solemnly they pronounced Harbin a suicide, and the fact that the cabin too was destroyed, showed how determined the man was to leave. The tightly twisted wire around his neck, with the other end over the center rafter not completely burned, was really what did it and the fire was just to make sure.

That was the way to do it around here, the six said to each other and nodded sagely. Don't make a pest of yourself; if that's what you have to do, do it — but make sure. Remember Burke? Burke had done something like that too when he wired the eight sticks of powder to his head, set a short fuse and then jumped into that 312-foot mine shaft. "Had these eight sticks tucked under a wire around his head — they were stickin' straight up, like candles on a cake!" Dynamite, of course, always blew down, so nobody bothered to go lower himself into the shaft to see if Burke made it or not.

Burke made it all right, and so did Harbin. The six went back to town and their daily grinds with pick and shovel, pen and paper, towel and glass, lock and key, mortar and pestle, pasteboards.

The six nodded. All of us nodded too and some sagely. Harbin was gone and couldn't answer questions. But how'd he done that now? Had he slipped the wire around his neck first and then set fire to the place, or had he started the fire first and then got out the wire, twisted it around his neck and made the other end fast over that rafter? It was hard to tell. When the Marshall removed what was left of Harbin and the rains had beaten the ashes down and the ravens had worked it over and the wolverines nosed it thoroughly, there was no point in anyone else's stirring the embers. Just like when that dynamite went off and Burke only halfway down the shaft.

So everyone minded his own business and if you didn't want to do that, you could move on, Bub. So you never talked about where you came from or why you'd come from there; and the name you used

was your own affair; and you read an old magazine in the bunkhouse, hearing the wind moan across the tundra; and you went to bed and got up and ate breakfast and held your face blank and once in awhile said "Pass the high-grade" when you wanted it for your coffee or "Pass the low-grade" when you wanted it for your oatmeal. And if there was dessert, you might say, "Pass the long-johns." They were coated with maple frosting.

You knew what your work was and you went out and did it and they paid you for it and you took the money and saved your checks till you went to town alone and when you came back you worked again and said little.

That is, no one said much except John. When he wasn't stoking his huge frame at the long table, and when he'd reached the point where he was full to the front teeth of all the things that bothered him, he'd say a few words. And when John said a few words, everyone knew he'd said a few words. He couldn't speak like other men. His chest was too big and full of sound wind and his vocal cords thick as hemp rope. John was so big he looked short. He could stand flat-footed and place the palm of his hand on anything eight feet in the air, but his legs were short. His face was brick-red from exposure to the cold and wind, and from the pressure inside of him. When John finally said his few words, they echoed back from the ridges and the walls of the canyons, and everyone including Buck the Foreman who might be a mile away heard them; and the foxes stopped on the snow in their dainty tracks and looked over their furry shoulders.

We'd walk the three miles back to camp from the ancient creek-bed where the drill-rigs were set up, in the dead of night while the next shift took over where we'd left off. And we'd feel like ghouls walking across the road over the tailing piles, silent and tired and cold in the arctic night. On those bone-chilling walks when it was too cold to smoke and the squeak of your shoepacks on the snow sounded like high C on a violin, John liked to say a few bitter words. He'd hold the sides of his old grey stocking-cap and thrust his head up into it, cup his ears in the palms of his leather choppers and then, in silent fury, rewind the toilet paper around his neck and pull his collar over it. Then he'd rear back and scream his defiance at the power lines that crossed the road at one of the bends. He'd stand there with his big red mouth steaming like a hot geyser, obscenities coming out like vomit — faster and faster and out of control. He'd scream and bellow and the ridges would throw the roaring of it back in the still night

and we'd all look away. And the wires would just hum like stone-frozen death and whine and loop over the cross-arms of the pole where the sign read: "Keep off — 33,000 volts."

And sometimes when we'd turn that sharp bend and walk in a dark huddle past the snow- and ice-covered pond lined with stiffened willows, the ice would boom out like splintering thunder and a high-pitched whine would shriek down the valley like the shell of a monster gun. And John would thunder back, *"Hellooooo Addamsssss!"* A sudden chill struck us then that wasn't in the frost of the night. And, for the thousandth time, John would tell us how Addams was going to push the snow off the pond with the big bulldozer so they could cut the ice out with the steam points and float the gold dredge in. And how they told him the ice was twelve feet thick but it was only twelve inches that spring, and how he cracked through a rotten spot and went down like a plummet — a hundred and sixty feet of inky-black icewater — and rested on the bottom; and the dredge hooked the tractor out later but Addams stayed on the bottom forever with his pockets full of iron wrenches. It was "Dredge Basin 232" on the company charts but we called it "Addams Pond," and that was fair, wasn't it?

It was strange that winter about the feud between John and the juice in those power lines. He could work himself into an almost incontrollable fury over it. The answer could have been that it made a little man with a switch lever the working equal of John himself. You didn't need the stone-age strength of John to push a button. You might mention strong men to John. Then he always spoke a few words about his brother Elffy. How they worked in a coal mine once, he and his strong brother, robbing pillars. The powder charge set off a fire at the entrance to the room in which Elffy was robbing pillars, so they'd walled it up with cement and pumped soft, flowing mud into the room and kept the fire from spreading, in fact, put it out after a year and a half. That was how Elffy made it.

"Couldn't you help him get out, John?"

"I didn't wass dere wit him at de time!"

But if he had been, he'd've clawed his way to him and out together. John would have burst through at the top of the mountain if that had been the only way.

So, during an early thaw that spring and still a month or so before the Marshal found Harbin's char, John reached up to draw down the slack-lever on his drill-rig. There was slush on the ground and John braced himself and buried his feet in it. He'd forgotten about the old

familiar short in that rig and when he took hold of the lever, the waiting, surging force of a whole battery of generators a hundred miles away ran through his salty frame to earth in the slush and held him there quivering and rattling the lever. That was how John made it. His leather mitten was charred and brittle and curled-up-dry as he was laid out on the work-bench in the pump-house. The wind came up strong again that night and the snow with it, and the false spring was over for awhile, and John lay there alone and frozen solid. He was like a fallen statue, lips framed to say a few words. The feud was settled.

But even then, if John had wanted to do in Harbin, he'd've yanked his head off and thrown it against a tamarack and let the wolves carry it off, worry and gnaw it in one of those dens under the Bench. We knew that . . .

But no one said a word about it, least of all Silent Sam. Silent Sam, also known as Dirty Sam who changed his long handles only in the fall — late fall — and whose tin-pants glistened with the accumulated grime of years. Sam said nothing about it because that was the nature of Sam and also because Sam wasn't there that spring to say anything about it. He'd spent the winter in his lonely cabin somewhere on the ridges, trapping ermine in his woodpile and martens in box-traps he made to resemble in minutest detail a picture he'd once seen of the manger in which Christ was born. Sam didn't show up that spring, nor ever thereafter. He may have slipped through a hole in the ice somewhere, or frozen on the trail, or stumbled into a snow-covered shaft. He may have made it the cold way and Sam hated the cold. He must have hated the cold even in the summertime. He built fires to guard against it. In his lonely cabin where he spent his winters, he had three stoves with glory-holes and one open fireplace and he kept them all roaring. No matter where we went or what we did, Sam built the fire to boil the water or melt the snow for coffee. Even when it rained and the moss oozed water like a wet sponge, Sam knew where to reach under the lip of an overhanging ledge for dry leaves or dead roots, or peel the bark from a birch and make it explode as though soaked in oil. So Sam wasn't around when the Marshal came back from the cabin where Harbin'd tried to pass the winter but couldn't stand the lonely, wind-whipped darkness.

But if Sam had known something, he wouldn't have told, no matter where he was, not Sam. Even if he wasn't thawing out and getting soft on a sand bar somewhere.

There were the others too, tight-lipped. There was Charlie, who

said his name was Smith, but it'd been that twelve years ago and he'd changed it twelve times since. Charlie sometimes split his bottle with Harbin. There were Big Red, whose name was Morgan now, and Bill "Spruce" and all the others — dulled, silent. Brooders.

There was old, stoop-shouldered, runny-nosed Louey. But when Louey opened his mouth now, when he wasn't at the long, narrow table, he only babbled. It was getting worse with him, and the lucidity which he once must have had was slipping fast, and Louey was on his way to making it — perhaps the soft, easy way. Louey forgot things. Louey was an old dreamer. But he still clacked his fuchsine gums about the girl-beaver he once knew back on the creeks. She'd sit there in the middle of the creek alongside the dam she'd built all night and watch Louey tear it down so the water could flow on down to the dredge pond and the dredge could float and send its endless chain of buckets down to scratch and gouge the bedrock and scoop up the flour-gold. She'd sit there and cry, and Louey could hear her snuffle as he worked and the water drained from behind the logs she'd peeled and plastered down. And the next day Louey'd be back tearing it down again and after awhile she'd change her tactics and try other wiles of her sex on him, combing her hair attractively when she saw him coming, and smoothing her long guard-whiskers back along her cheeks and rolling her eyes maidenly. So said Louey. Louey the Fox's Friend, who hung all the camp's stale doughnuts on the tips of the short spruce trees — this for the shy ones; but who could call his old pot-partners to him with the rustle of a paper sack. They came to him from all points, circling him, licking their chops and, in excited anticipation, suddenly feeling a mass urge to urinate, the vixens squatting brazenly just beyond the reach of his hand, the dogs stiff-legged against the willows. To Louey it was seemly. He might do that himself right then — either way.

Harbin killed those foxes. It was easy. Blew their pointed, sharp-eared heads to gobbets and bone chips with No. 8 shot; skinned them out and left their carcasses freeze to blue-black flint that rang to the hammering of the ravens' beaks. Harbin did that the winter before he himself turned into a substance that was black but not flint-hard.

Through the spring and summer Louey was ineffably sad. His simple dream of pet foxes roaming the ridges and barking their greeting to him disappeared into the misty corners of his disturbed mind. His body too, after more than forty years of brutal swinking, was becoming gaunt and withered and his elbow-pads hung loose. So, if he knew that Harbin'd done it, that knowledge stayed behind

the tangled drapes in his mind and his skinny arms along his sides. It took Harbin a week to drink off what the pelts brought and to return to camp, bleary-eyed and sullen.

And then one morning Louey left for town. His eyes sparkled and the scrubbed skin of his face shone with the laundry soap not thoroughly rinsed. In his hip-pocket he carried the carefully folded checks which he had accumulated during the period of a year or more. He returned four times. Once for his cap which he had forgotten; once for a bag-lunch which he had prepared and secreted a week before; once because he had started out in the wrong direction. When he returned the fourth time, night had fallen and he was hollow-eyed and fevered with fatigue. But his trip had been successful. His new gloves fitted him well and the woolen socks would sure be warm, wouldn't they? And he'd met a very kind man who had promised to hold his checks for him until such time as he would have further need. The man had even asked him to write his name on the backs of the checks so that he would be sure to remember the name and not confuse it with someone else's.

At breakfast the next morning, someone broke the silence and said, "Pass the low-grade."

It could have been the sound of the words or it could have been just the sound. Louey didn't say. But he suddenly came to. He pushed his plate away, placed his elbows on the table, sighed and asked, "Does anyone here know of a small mine that an old man can work all by himself?" Everyone kept on eating. "Not a big one, understand. No. Just a small one. Just a one-man mine."

No one looked up but the low-grade started from both ends of the long table. Louey coughed lightly then and went outside. Harbin did not return for more than a month.

Louey babbled on through the summer about his girl-beavers and foxes and one-man mines. There seemed to be another thread that sometimes worked its way to the front. Louey would tug at it, dropping the papery lids over his old eyes and holding his brow. But the thread would slip from his grasp and drop back again — back into the snarled skeins.

Then, when the days shortened and the morning sun saw rime on the edge of the creeks, a run-off ditch cracked its bank and had to be sandbagged. It was cold, wet, muscle-tearing work, filling the sacks with sand, handling them, tying them, carrying them, stuffing them in a holding pattern into the break. You hated to spend the money you earned for such work. What could you buy?

That was the day, though — it was all there for anyone to see.

The story was there. It was as plain as though a crier had stood there with his back to that clump of white, dusty-trunked birches and called the turns. First of all there was Sam, silently tending his beautiful blaze, keeping the sand from freezing into unwieldy chunks that would not slip into the sacks. It was a clean fire he had that day, clean and fiercely hot. The wood was dry and seasoned, and Sam tended it well, poking the embers with a rod and sending the glowing sparks upward into the cold, clean air. Sometimes he'd warm his hands over it, rubbing them slowly together or standing tensely to one side watching with his eyes aglitter.

Then there was Harbin carrying the sacks from where the necks were wire-tied, to the break in the ditch, dumping them down with a grunted oath and shouldering his way back for another. Harbin liked to shoulder his way. He hunted out narrow walks so that he might jar people, and sometimes things, in passing. And on that day he hunted hard. Harbin in the prime of life, shuffling along with eyes downcast and shoulder cocked.

Buck the Foreman stood to one side.

There was Louey wiping his nose on his sleeve, his hip-pockets bristling with the ends of the wire-ties. Louey tied the bags after they were shoveled full. He'd slip one of the wire loops over the hook on the end of his bag-binder, sniff, wipe his nose, take a deep breath and pull the lever which twisted the wire and sank it into the gathered ends at the neck of the sack. Then he would rest from this exertion and wait for the next bag to be filled with sand.

There was John lifting up the bags for Louey to tie and passing them to Harbin and the others who carried them off to the break. John hugging the heavy sacks like a grizzly holding a hog, swaying slightly as though on a ship in swells and handing the sacks over with one boom-like arm. He didn't say his few words that day, but his eyes were open wide and clear with a light that shone from behind them.

There is the picture then. Old Louey with his tired eyes watching Harbin, squinting now and then at Harbin shuffling off with his loaded sack. Old boy and old eyes trying desperately and failing miserably to pierce a misty veil. Sudden fleeting light and, as sudden, sooty darkness. Louey tried that day — tried hard, and John watched him trying. And if John saw the creases pull smooth on Louey's face and then return in the space of a heartbeat, perhaps he took it for something else.

Silent Sam stood and watched and tended his fire. He watched John hug the bags and hold them and he watched old Louey tie off

their necks and he watched Harbin act the insufferable swine and he watched Buck the Foreman watch them all. And no one said a word — not even the crier with his back to the birches — because it wasn't necessary, was it?

Now it is some weeks later. It is the afternoon of the same day that Harbin happened to meet old Louey in the bunkhouse hallway, shouldered him and then, in a fit of lushy rage, slapped him down; gave him flat open-hands to the jowls that hung Louey's jaw slack, glazed his eyes and hunkered him into a corner, whimpering. Louey sits and stares vacantly, his stinging cheek goes numb, the film in his mind clears and it is as though two loose wire-ends there are jarred together and the current flows. The current flows backward as current will do — impelled by a head-ringing slap. Louey is back in his youthful prime. *He is tall and lean and unstooped. He enters the stale-smelling flat and hears the high, whining voice, and his eardrums shrivel. "They got 'im for fair this time, Louey!" she says and hics. Louey tries to make some reply but cannot. Suddenly the thought that this is the woman once entwined with every dream of his life, overwhelms him and he presses his temples. She goes on, "I beat 'im enough, but it din't help. You shoulda done it too — he's yours s'much as mine!" Louey sees the table sprinkled with cheese-parings, an empty bottle on its side. "He'll git thirty years fer it," the voice goes on gleefully. "Come right in, they did, an' hauls 'im out from under 'is bed by the heels." The lights begin to dim for Louey then and he fumbles for the switch. . . .* The moment is mercifully short — a spark's lifetime; the ends of the wires glow and burn out. Louey sniffs and rubs his cheek.

It is still the afternoon of that same day and Harbin would have sold his foul black soul for a drink. Now watch! There go the three of them. John in the lead with a bottle of bait bulging his pocket, his eyes strangely lighted; Harbin reels along behind him, eyes glued to John's pocket, lower lip flabby, feet shuffling, heedless of the powdery snow; Louey brings up the rear, following in the track left by Harbin. Louey is warmly dressed this cold late afternoon. Someone has drawn paw-like, wool-lined leather mitts over his new dress gloves. Someone has tucked a warm tissue muffler around his scrawny neck and wound strips of burlap around his ankles to keep out the snow. His face is freshly bathed and his cheeks glow pink. Louey clacks and gabbles at the tiny white birds that flit through the stunted spruce. He is breathing open-mouthed, his nose running as usual.

They stop in the lee of the pen-stock. Behind its heavy, rough-planked quarter the air is calm. John takes the bottle from his pocket,

uncorks it and hands it to Harbin. Harbin drinks long and noisily and clutches the bottle tightly. John steps behind him, picks up the cached gunny sack and hands it to Louey. Louey grins blunt-wittedly, takes the sack and draws out the tie-binder. By the time Harbin sees what Louey holds in his hand and wonders about it, John has him from behind. John holds Harbin like a girder-limbed brown bear, reared up, white spittle spraying from the corners of his mouth. It is John who insists on using the gunny sack. "Pull it overrr hees headt, Louey!" he says. Louey slips it over as Harbin strains and flails with his feet. Now Louey fumbles with the wire loop and finally gets an extra long one adjusted. He slips it over the sack on Harbin's head, feels for the neck and pulls the lever. Harbin stiffens, gives a mighty lurch and loses control of his sphincter muscles. Slowly John releases him and lets him sink to the ground, his hands and feet twitching and jerking. Louey looks back over the trail, sees the snowbirds and goes off in childish pursuit.

The deed is done. John makes several attempts to pick up the body, drops it and waits a moment longer. And now we see him ploughing through the drifts in the Canyon, his grisly burden under one arm. Up the Canyon he beats his way, past Raven's Bench and up the draw. And look! Who is that to the side and just behind him? Like the wraith of a rusty-coated fox he follows, quietly parting the snow-laden willows, silent, intent and fingering his matches.

John hangs the corpse and quickly heads back to camp and Sam pushes open the door of the ownerless cabin. Sam does his part well and the flames lick heavenward, clean and hot, the smoke smelling slightly acrid.

Much later, the following spring, when the willows still up to their knees in ice have popped their catkins, after the six men have had their solemn say and the Marshal's chore is done, Buck the Foreman discovers that the sack-binder is missing. He buys a new one with his own money. He does this of his own accord and without the knowledge of anyone else. He does it the day after he cleans out what Harbin has left behind. This is not unusual work for Buck the Foreman. He has cleaned up after the dead before.

Buck sorts out the things that are left and makes a neat pile of what may have value to possible heirs or to the Law, burns the rest. He burns the old pawn tickets, the union cards, the birth certificate. Buck is not the Foreman because he is a dullard or because the glare on the snow has scathed his vision. He scuffs the maple handle of the sack-binder, rubs off the newness and hangs it on the proper hook in the tool shed.

JAMES HAFLEY:

A Reading of 'Between the Acts'

Virginia Woolf's last novel, *Between the Acts,* was published posthumously in 1941. It is the shortest of all her novels — a mere 48,000 words — and, like *Mrs. Dalloway,* is printed as an undivided unit with the exception of occasional double-spacings between paragraphs. The setting is a "remote village in the very heart of England"; the action begins on a night in June, 1939, and ends on the following night, after the performance of a village pageant at Pointz Hall. The pageant itself, depicting the history of England, occupies a little over one sixth of the novel; it consists of a prologue suggesting the infancy of England, three acts — the Elizabethan, Augustan and Victorian ages — and an epilogue suggesting contemporary England. The main characters of the novel are Miss La Trobe, the author of the pageant, and certain members of her audience: Bartholomew Oliver, owner of Pointz Hall; Lucy Swithin, his sister; Giles and Isabella Oliver, his son and daughter-in-law; Mrs. Manresa and William Dodge, Londoners who intrude at Pointz Hall for luncheon and remain to see the pageant. The extremely over-simplified statement of the pageant is interrelated with the extremely complex relations between these characters to produce the novel as a whole.

The title has been given many interpretations, and indicates, in the number of meanings which can be legitimately drawn from it, the extent of symbolical suggestion through the entire novel. Joan Bennett, for example, finds "between the acts" to mean the human comedy presented between the acts of the pageant, the interval between World Wars One and Two, and the interval in the love of Giles and Isabella; John Graham writes that "the novel as a whole is a pageant occurring literally *between the acts* of the drama which the reader himself plays before and after reading it." But although each of these four meanings is justifiable and valuable, none of them is of central importance to the novel itself. *Between the Acts*, although it embodies many of Virginia Woolf's concepts, is first and foremost a novel about free will; the title becomes clearest when "acts" is understood in the sense of "actions." Between the actions of Giles and Isabella Oliver, this novel demonstrates that behavior is a result not of necessity but of

free will. The novel begins when, after a series of actions, Giles and Isa have paused; it concludes just before they are to begin another action: "Then the curtain rose. They spoke." The novel is not concerned with the acts themselves, but rather with what happened between the acts — specifically, with what *caused* the acts.

Freedom, in Bergsonian terms, is the condensation of clock time to mind time — of "actual time" to "mind time," in the language of *Between the Acts* — by means of perception and memory; each moment then becomes an original creation, each act a free act. Space is determinable; time is not; therefore, an act motivated by and in pure time perception is undetermined or free. Now according to Bergson himself, "consciousness, which is a *need of creation*, is made manifest to itself only where creation is possible. It lies dormant when life is condemned to automatism; it wakens as soon as the possibility of a choice is restored . . . consciousness is synonymous with invention and with freedom." To be unconscious or "half-conscious" is to be enslaved. Free will exists only in pure time; but pure time is the only reality; therefore, necessity is mere appearance, and free will is real. Simply, then, in relation to Bergson's basic concept, life making itself (the vital impetus, spirit) is free, but life unmaking itself (matter) is doomed to necessity. The will attains freedom when it ceases to be individual and becomes one with the vital impetus. So long as a person shields his identity, he cannot act with free will; when he transcends personality, he achieves freedom, and movement in becoming. Consciousness is freedom.

In her earlier novels, Virginia Woolf had shown, without emphasizing free will, the evolution of certain persons toward the Real and their attainment of it. Clarissa Dalloway, Lily Briscoe, Orlando, Bernard, Eleanor Pargiter — all move to an awareness which they finally attain. In *Between the Acts,* however, since the emphasis differs, so also does the nature and amount of individual perception. Lucy Swithin, like Mrs. Ramsay, is shown, not becoming aware, but having become aware; Giles and Isa, however, though they are shown becoming aware, do not reach awareness during the course of the novel.

Mrs. Swithin is "free"; Isa is "entangled" and, with Giles and William Dodge, "caught and caged." Mrs. Swithin, over seventy years old, "was given to increasing the bounds of the moment by flights into past or future"; she walks "as if the floor were fluid"; her favorite book is an Outline of History, and her comments and thoughts about this book not only symbolize her own pure-time existence but also

give the novel itself an almost infinite scope. She is nicknamed "Old Flimsy," and "flimsy" is, in newspaper jargon, a semi-transparent paper. Mrs. Swithin, then, is spirit. "Above, the air rushed; beneath was water. She stood between two fluidities. . . ."

In direct contrast to Lucy is her brother, Bart. "For she belonged to the unifiers; he to the separatists." She represents faith, and he reason. Bart, impatient with Lucy's tendency to exaggerate, in love with facts and distrustful of her impressions, resembles Mr. Ramsay of *To the Lighthouse;* here, too, there is talk about the weather:

> "It's very unsettled. It'll rain, I'm afraid. We can only pray," she added, and fingered her crucifix.
>
> "And provide umbrellas," said her brother.

Mrs. Swithin's crucifix, worn on a chain about her neck, is significant. *Between the Acts* is the only one of Virginia Woolf's novels in which a sympathetic character is Christian, and in which Christianity itself is treated with anything like sympathy. Mrs. Swithin is extremely religious; to be sure, religion is mainly a symbol of the spiritual life, as Bart's thought about it indicates: "it was not in books the answer to his question — why, in Lucy's skull . . . there existed a prayable being? She didn't, he supposed, invest it with hair, teeth or toenails. It was . . . more of a force or radiance . . . It got her out of bed on a cold morning and sent her down the muddy path to worship it, whose mouthpiece was Streatfield." But, although bumbling Streatfield is no hero, religion, in this novel, has more than symbolic value. The purpose of the pageant is to raise money for the installation of electric lights in the village church— the "illumination" of the church. Further, although the old chapel at Pointz Hall is now used as a larder, nevertheless the question is asked, "can the Christian faith adapt itself? . . . It's odd that science, so they tell me, is making things (so to speak) more spiritual . . . The very latest notion, so I'm told is, nothing's solid." And William Dodge, who looks at Mrs. Swithin's crucifix and wonders "How could she weight herself down by that sleek symbol? How stamp herself, so volatile, so vagrant, with that image?" is himself physically "unsettled as to sex" and unable to communicate because of his attachment to his own identity.

The pageant, if it has the purpose of illuminating the church, has also the purpose of illuminating the novel. In a series of very good parodies of English drama, written mostly in very bad verse, Miss La Trobe has tried to set forth her vision. For although the city council

has neglected to bring water to the village, Miss La Trobe has written her pageant; although, that is to say, government can give no order or meaning to human life, art — even, it would seem, bad art — can. The pageant, by placing the English past into the present day, accomplishes for the audience on one level what Mrs. Swithin has been able to accomplish for herself on another. Naturally, Mrs. Swithin appreciates what Miss La Trobe has done, and thanks her: "What a small part I've had to play! But you've made me feel I could have played . . . Cleopatra!" The pageant is acted by villagers, so that it becomes a dramatization of consciousness. Just as the actors, annihilating their own identities in the English past, obtain freedom, so the present moment, itself inseparable from the past, becomes free; so also, Isa and Giles, at the conclusion of the novel, begin a free act, after the irresoluteness which has characterized them during the day. They are left alone;

> Giles crumpled the newspaper and turned out the light. Left alone together for the first time that day, they were silent. Alone, enmity was bared; also love. Before they slept, they must fight; after they had fought, they would embrace. From that embrace another life might be born. But first they must fight, as the dog fox fights with the vixen, in the heart of darkness, in the fields of night.
>
> Isa let her sewing drop. The great hooded chairs had become enormous. And Giles, too. And Isa too against the window. The window was all sky without colour. The house had lost its shelter. It was the night that dwellers in caves had watched from some high place among rocks.
>
> Then the curtain rose. They spoke.

Here, the Bergsonian prerequisites for free will have been attained: the whole past is in the present, so that the present moment is no longer spatialized; the past is a purely temporal past, so that the present moment will be a creation, a unique achievement — this act will be the first act ever to have been done; Isa and Giles have shed their immediate identity and become "enormous." They are the actors, acting the play; there is no longer a difference between the pageant world and the actual world, for past and present have become one in pure time.

But it is art which has made this act possible. The pageant has supplied for Giles and Isa that consciousness which they themselves could not achieve, and, no doubt, do not recognize. Isa has been disturbed by an attraction for Rupert Haines, Giles by upset over the state of world affairs and an attraction for Mrs. Manresa, that "wild

child of nature." Their lust, like the lust of William Dodge for Giles, has caused them to separate present from past. Giles, indeed, repeating the line "Where there's a Will there's a Way," from the pageant, sees in that only a prompting to pursue Mrs. Manresa. He refuses consciousness; walking to the barn he notices "a snake. Dead? No, choked with a toad in its mouth. The snake was unable to swallow; the toad was unable to die. A spasm made the ribs contract; blood oozed. It was birth the wrong way round — a monstrous inversion." Giles stamps upon the snake and toad; his shoes are stained, but "it was action. Action relieved him." It is this kind of action which interpenetrates the conscious states, disrupting consciousness, interrupting the creative evolution of the memory which precedes the free act. This, too, is "birth the wrong way round — a monstrous inversion," for it moves away from consciousness and creative perception to material action, in a path opposite to that of the vital impetus. The play, however, supplies for Giles and Isa the consciousness which they lack, and enables them to act freely and creatively. It is, perhaps, in this sense that the pageant will provide "illumination." Since the pageant is a representation of consciousness, a denial of spatialized identity, it can encourage the awareness of Giles and Isa in their becoming, even though it does not accomplish that awareness. Thus, as the spectators move away after the pageant, several of them illustrate, by their remarks about it, the kind of effect which it can have. Although some dismiss it as "utter bosh," and some accept meekly the half-way interpretation of Streatfield, a few manage to work with the play: "Or was that, perhaps, what Miss La Trobe meant? . . . that if we don't jump to conclusions, if you think, and I think, perhaps one day, thinking differently, we shall think the same?" Their very search for meaning is, in a sense, the meaning itself, as part of their becoming.

But Giles and Isa, like Eleanor Pargiter in *The Years,* have public as well as private significance when, at the conclusion of *Between the Acts,* they begin to act. Indeed, as Warren Beck has pointed out in his valuable study of this novel, it is more than a coincidence that Isa's age — thirty-nine — is also the age of the century. It is for social as well as individual reasons, with social as well as individual implications, that these characters are "caught," "entangled"; just as Lucy Swithin's Outline of History combines with the pageant to give the novel temporal breadth, so also Giles' preoccupation with the disastrous state of affairs in Europe gives it spatial breadth and lends

social significance to the characters' attitudes and behavior. Another war would be, like the First World War in *Jacob's Room,* the surrender of consciousness to destructive and unthoughtful action.

In *The Years,* Delia's party depicted the chaotic — and mobile — state of contemporary life. In *Between the Acts,* it is the epilogue of the pageant which serves this purpose. The third act has been concerned with the static and sterile Victorian age, in which a policeman stands, *"truncheon in hand, guarding respectability, and prosperity, and the purity of Victoria's land,"* and singing *"'Ome, Sweet 'Ome."* Then comes an interval, during which members of the audience argue about the validity of Victorian values. After a symbolic transition — rain falls, a tableau shows the rebuilding of civilization after the War — the gramophone plays a waltz; birds fly about in time to the music; "perched on the wall, they seemed to foretell what after all the *Times* was saying yesterday. Homes will be built. Each flat with its refrigerator, in the crannied wall. Each of us a free man; plates washed by machinery; not an aeroplane to vex us; all liberated; made whole. . . ." How well this prophecy has been fulfilled is suggested throughout the pageant by the behavior of the gramophone: referred to as "the machine," it is constantly breaking down, and "chuff, chuff, chuff," or "tick, tick, tick," take the place of music. The machine is also clock time: "Time went on and on like the hands of the kitchen clock. (The machine chuffed in the bushes.)"

The machine now proceeds to play cacophonic rhythms instead of the smooth measures of the waltz; the actors suddenly appear before the audience carrying mirrors, "And the audience saw themselves, not whole by any means, but at any rate sitting still." But, with the exception of Mrs. Manresa, who takes advantage of her mirror by powdering her nose, the spectators refuse to look at themselves; as they sit embarrassedly evading themselves, a voice from the megaphone offers them the "moral" of the pageant: they are, indeed, despicable and base, yet they have certain redeeming qualities — *"the resolute refusal of some pimpled dirty little scrub in sandals to sell his soul,"* for example. And if the mirrors reflect them as "scraps, orts and fragments," yet the music from the gramophone — a familiar melody begins — affirms that they are whole and united. "Compelled from the ends of the horizon; recalled from the edge of appalling crevasses; they crashed; solved; united." There follows an "interpretation" of the pageant by the Reverend Streatfield — "an intolerable constriction, contraction, and reduction to simplified absurdity he was to be sure!"

The pageant, he feels, has said that "we are members one of another. Each is part of the whole. . . ." This is, of course, intended as a Christian interpretation — "Scraps, orts and fragments! Surely, we should unite?" But he is interrupted by the sound of a formation of aeroplanes flying overhead: the unity is disrupted.

As she has done in previous novels, Virginia Woolf here again rejects traditional mysticism, with its belief in One beneath the Many. Despite its superficial resemblance to her own perspective, Streatfield's is really much different. In *Between the Acts* as in the earlier novels, it is not the One which Virginia Woolf affirms; denying the One, denying the Many, she affirms the Manyness beneath the Many; the aeroplanes' interruption, which destroys Streatfield's interpretation, at the same time illustrates Virginia Woolf's by its suggestion of a changeless change, an unceasing mobility, in comparison with which traditional mysticism is static. It is the unity of the separateness beneath separate individuals which constitutes the One, from this point of view; the One is, therefore, Manyness. It is precisely the interruption which is the unity.

This paradox appears as well in the title and central problem of the novel. It is between the acts that the acts are really accomplished; to will freely is precisely to remain undetermined, mobile, in consciousness of pure time existence: the self "lives and develops by means of its very hesitations, until the free action drops from it like an over-ripe fruit," Bergson has said. The only true stability is change, for immobility is death. Isa, who secretly writes poetry (and very bad poetry it must be), thinks in what can be called verse throughout the novel, and there is a correspondence between the imagery and themes of her poetry and the movement of the book itself. Her "poetry" reflects an awareness of which Isa is not immediately conscious; between the acts of the pageant, she "turned in the direction of the stable" — "stable" in both senses, concrete and abstract: "Where do I wander? she mused. Down what draughty tunnels? Where the eyeless wind blows? And there grows nothing for the eye. . . . Change is not; nor the mutable and lovable. . . ." Without change, mutability, the "rise and fall and fall and rise again," there cannot be life. It is because of change that, at the conclusion of the novel, "another life might be born" — another social as well as individual life, the "New World" of *The Years*. Miss La Trobe, again, thinks of this stability of instability with the same imagery that Virginia Woolf had used in *Orlando;* the audience at first "glared as if they were exposed to a

frost that nipped them and fixed them all at the same level. Only Bond the cowman looked fluid and natural." And when the wind carries away the words of the actors, so that the audience cannot understand, she thinks, "This is death"; but when the cows begin suddenly to bellow, so that "It was the primeval voice sounding loud in the ear of the present moment," Miss La Trobe exclaims, "Thank Heaven!" Consciousness is mobility and life. On another level, Miss La Trobe as artist illustrates this concept: it is not in contemplation of a finished work that she finds happiness, but in preparation for a new and better work. Neither the pageant of that afternoon nor the moment in the village pub afterward satisfies Miss La Trobe; instead, she lives in and for the becoming of her new play.

Indeed, the entire book has been concerned with a comparison between the progress of art and the progress of life. The emphasis — like that of *The Years* — is different from the emphasis of the earlier novels, different from the emphasis of Bergson or his disciple Proust. Lily Briscoe was content to have finished her painting, in *To the Lighthouse;* it was a bad picture; it would be hidden in an attic; nevertheless, she had completed it. Lily comes to rest as soon as she has had her vision. Miss La Trobe, on the other hand, is painfully conscious of the faults in her pageant, and, though it is completed, she is not at rest. Rather, she is using the past as a means for the future, seeing her new play in the light of what she has already done. It is, furthermore, not in an ivory tower or panelled library, but in a public house heavy with smoke and conversation, that she works — amid the flux of life instead of seemingly escaped from it.

In *The Years,* it had been suggested that "we all think the same things; only we do not say them." In *Between the Acts,* this idea finds formal expression, just as the idea that "nothing was simply one thing" had done in *The Waves.* Mrs. Swithin says, at one point, "We haven't the words — we haven't the words. . . . Behind the eyes; not on the lips; that's all." At the pageant, therefore, although each person sees the play somewhat differently, the audience tends to think about the play collectively — there are passages in which neither the author nor any one of the characters is thinking the thoughts transcribed, but in which the audience as a whole is thinking the same things. When Streatfield rises to speak, for example, "Of all incongruous sights a clergyman in the livery of his servitude to the summing up was the most grotesque and entire. He opened his mouth. O Lord, protect and preserve us from words the defilers, from words the impure! What need have we of words to remind us?

Must I be Thomas, you Jane?" That 'prayer,' the context makes clear, is neither the author's nor any one of the characters'; rather, it is a transcription of collective response, much as the soliloquies in *The Waves* were transcriptions of individual response. This device is used here only occasionally; had Virginia Woolf lived to write another novel, she might have used it more pervasively.

Between the Acts has brought forth from the critics remarkably contradictory and extreme opinions. According to Louis Kronenberger, this novel, "by all means her weakest, . . . represents only another step in her steady creative decline. . . . The book ends with two of the real people about to confront each other; it should, of course, have begun there." Philip Rahv calls it Virginia Woolf's "most unhappy book." Warren Beck and Joan Bennett, however, give it high praise, and Walter Allen thinks it "among the finest novels of our time." Generally, it seems that those critics who have revealed an awareness of the complexities and meaning of *Between the Acts* have tended to rank it high, whereas those to whom it is not a clear novel have dismissed it.

Probably the most adequate valuation is James B. Wilson's: Wilson thought *Between the Acts* "a completed novel but perhaps an unfinished work of art." For even if this novel is considered as potentially more comprehensive than *The Years*, certainly it does not equal that great masterpiece as an actual achievement.

In a note prefixed to *Between the Acts,* Leonard Woolf has explained that it was finished but had not been finally revised — subjected to those careful minor alterations characteristic of Virginia Woolf's method — at the time of Virginia Woolf's death. This seems, in view of the book itself, to justify Wilson's statement. As a novel, *Between the Acts* is a finished product: its form is in every way consistent and expressive. But as a work of art — that is to say, in the smaller but important matters of style and texture, and even in so relatively unimportant a thing as punctuation — it is not quite finished in comparison with even the less satisfying of the earlier novels. Isa's poetic reveries, for example, are neither good enough as poetry to be stylistically justified in their own right, nor yet quite bad enough to stand away from context: they are not poetry, but it is difficult to be certain that they were not intended by the author as poetry. The poetry of the pageant has no such ambiguity — it is clearly the rather clumsy expression of a sincere poetess, Miss La Trobe, at the same time that it is symbolic of Miss La Trobe's general difficulty, for one reason or another, of communication. But Isa's poetry is neither good

nor *significantly* bad. Perhaps, to be sure, the flaw is one which Virginia Woolf herself did not notice, but that is doubtful — despite the occasionally over-elaborate prose of *The Waves* — since her earlier works do not usually suffer from such flaws. Rather, it is probable that after her revisions this blemish would have been remedied. However, *Between the Acts* must be read as it is, and not as it might or would or should have been; and, as it is, it has not the overall certainty of, say, *To the Lighthouse* or *The Years.*

Although *Between the Acts* is "an unfinished work of art" according to the standard set by most of Virginia Woolf's own previous works, it is one of her most important novels, because it manages at once to relate public and private values in its expression of her more comprehensive and appealing philosophical perspective, and to do so against a background so cosmic as to invest almost every particular in the book with universal implications. Again, because of such formal potentialities as the extreme condensation and the transcription of collective response, *Between the Acts* is important not only in itself and as the last of Virginia Woolf's novels, but also as a fresh step in her continual endeavor to "prepare the way for masterpieces to come."

Among Recent Books

GORDON N. RAY:

The Bennett Problem

REGINALD POUND: *Arnold Bennett: a Biography.* Harcourt, Brace.

No one would argue, I suppose, that the present age will rank high in the history of British literature. Both the energy and the talent needed for great creative works are absent, and the most characteristic of present-day British productions are religious novels of highly specialized appeal and poetic plays which have their fragile being in an atmosphere still more rarefied. It might almost be maintained, indeed, that the best of England's current literary abilities are devoted to the exploration of the English past, particularly of the hundred years before the first World War. The heritage of this rich period has a fascination for the austerity-bound writer of today that is irresistible.

As a consequence the Edwardian years are today receiving full documentation at an ever-accelerating pace. To such primary works as the autobiographies of

Sir Osbert Sitwell, Wells, and Yeats have recently been added excellent full-scale biographies of Lord Keynes and Hugh Walpole. This list must now be extended to include Reginald Pound's biography of Arnold Bennett, a work of not inferior merit. It is true that Mr. Pound is a journalist and reviewer, not a critic; and it is true that he takes Bennett's achievement as a novelist for granted. These would be unforgivable deficiencies in a biographer of Conrad or Henry James. With Mr. Pound's subject they hardly matter; for Bennett freely admitted that much of his work was journalism, and the leading note of his personality from the first was business-like common sense. Mr. Pound's knowledge of the English journalistic world is detailed and extensive; his grasp of the realities of British nature is sure. When an illegitimate daughter was born to Bennett at the age of sixty, he sent news of the event to Wells, writes Mr. Pound, "in the tone of a struggling amateur reporting to the highest authority." The narrative is marked by many passages equally witty and neat, and it acquires therefrom a stamp of authority, even at times of distinction.

The picture of Bennett that emerges is very ingratiating. He is seen as a character out of Balzac, with a career to match, who yet managed somehow to preserve a fundamental decency and wholesomeness. By emphasizing his inner insecurity and its consequences (a stammer, constant insomnia, attacks of neuralgia, fits of depression), Mr. Pound reconciles the reader to Bennett's compensating assertiveness. Both the youthful "card" worshipping success and the mature public man with his blatant paeans of triumph and his pompous and dandified manner appear as inessential disguises which cannot conceal Bennett's basic honesty, kindliness, and good sense. And in later life Bennett's bluff aggressiveness was often of the greatest usefulness in dislodging entrenched mediocrity to make way for new talent. He was among the earliest of influential English writers to praise Dreiser, Eliot, Faulkner, Joyce, and the Sitwells. And his skirmishings with the Royal Academy were incessant. In 1918 we find him writing, for example: "I am now on the Imperial War Memorial Committee . . . [whose object] is to procure a complete record of the whole blooming war in paint, ink and sculpture. I have succeeded in turning down *all* Royal Academy painters, except Clauson. Some feat, believe me! Yes, I have turned down the inevitable Brangwyn." The note of gleefulness is characteristic.

But Bennett was more than a benevolent and powerful protector of young artists. He was also an artist himself, though a sporadic and uncertain one. Here one encounters what Dixon Scott long ago called the "Bennett problem," the confusing professional dualism which led him to write *Anna of the Five Towns* in the same year as *The Grand Babylon Hotel,* and *Clayhanger* in the same year as *The Card.* What Wells told him in 1903—"the clever Bennett is going to be a fearful job for the artist Bennett to elude"—turned out to be all too accurate a prediction. Of Bennett's eighty books, only four or five *(Anna of the Five Towns, The Old Wives' Tale, Clayhanger, Riceyman Steps,* and perhaps *These Twain)* survive. But to go back to these novels, or even to enter Bennett's mind as he wrote them (as one can in his important letters to Wells first printed by Mr. Pound), is to conceive a profound respect for the craftsmanship, the sympathetic understanding, and the devotion to the writer's task that are everywhere apparent in Bennett's best work. It is to be hoped that Mr. Pound's admirable biography will lead many readers back to these books. They will not be disappointed.

SHERMAN PAUL:
Symbolism in the American Renaissance

CHARLES FEIDELSON, JR.: *Symbolism and American Literature.* The University of Chicago Press.

Mr. Feidelson has given us the most sophisticated and brilliant study of our classic writers since F. O. Matthiessen's *American Renaissance.* A work of extensive research and scope, it is also an original synthesis of remarkable clarity and subtlety of thought, written with the ease and compression that come only with mastery. And there was much to master: the writings of Emerson, Thoreau, Poe, Whitman, Melville, Hawthorne and Horace Bushnell — the central figures of the study; the work of modern symbolists, notably André Gide; the theoretical literature of modern symbolism and philosophy — Hulme, Eliot, Empson, Richards, Whitehead, Cassirer, etc.; the intellectual history of America from the Puritans to the mid-nineteenth century, focussing on Ramus, Edwards, and the Transcendentalists; and the still larger intellectual history out of which the concern with symbolism arose, Aquinas and Dante, Locke and the Kantians, and Descartes, who, one is inclined to say, cursed the modern mind with the persistent problem of epistemology. All of this is admirably used to explore the common ground our classic authors shared — the preoccupation with symbolic method — and to show that that ground was *native* ground, bequeathed to them by the American predilection for rational thought. Thus this study points backward to the origins of our literary tradition, and also points forward to the conscious symbolism of modern literature, for which the American Renaissance served as a proving ground.

To establish this alone is a major contribution, for it makes the study of our classic writers more than an act of devotion; and it gives the contemporary writer a root in our tradition that he desperately needs, a root more viable, certainly, than the one Van Wyck Brooks has tended. There are numerous incidental contributions as well; whatever Mr. Feidelson has touched issues in a new evaluation. Edwards, for instance, was not a Lockean, but a "philosophical symbolist" who took from Locke what he needed for his own radically different epistemology. Transcendentalism was not so much a religious movement as a revival of interest in method, language, and the process of creative thought. American romanticism was not romantic at all, in the rather limited sense of personal expression that Mr. Feidelson gives to the term: it was symbolic, seeking a solution to the duality of the Cartesian tradition which had its literary counterparts in romanticism (idealism) and naturalism (materialism). This interpretation, I feel, is one of convenience and almost indefensible considering the fact that the organic universe which is a presupposition of symbolism was part and parcel of romanticism, its most generic trait. To distinguish romanticism and symbolism in the way Mr. Feidelson does, clears the field of many of the romantic manifestations that went along with symbolic perception — the whole ethical and social side of that major shift in sensibility. And yet this distinction does not invalidate what Mr. Feidelson has chosen to study

under the rubric of symbolism; instead, it makes a worthwhile point, that American romanticism had its differences from other romanticisms. Whether symbolism was the major difference, however, I am not sure. Symbolism, according to Mr. Feidelson, eliminates egoism; but a greater restraint to the subjectivism that Emerson hated was the social tradition of intellectual leadership that was also in the American inheritance and which was taking new emphasis in the age of democracy. Nevertheless, that the Transcendental stage of American romanticism had an intellectual scope that made it unique, is true; and regardless of how Mr. Feidelson makes this point, it is a point of importance.

Not only has Mr. Feidelson reconsidered the intellectual tradition, he has provided us, I believe, with the most fruitful interpretations of the respective aesthetic problems of our classic authors. No one has so ably shown the intellectual stature of Emerson, who was the representative man of the symbolist movement; or shown why Thoreau had a less easy time applying the ideas than the master, or why Melville was in his debt. No one has seen so clearly Hawthorne's need for allegory — his rational distrust of the symbolic imagination, and, because of this, his mistaken search for materials. No one has written better of Poe's determination to destroy the rational universe, or of Bushnell's attempt to mediate theological controversy by the study of language. Nor has anyone, to my knowledge, given such secure readings of Whitman's "When Lilacs Last in the Dooryard Bloom'd," Poe's "The Fall of the House of Usher," Melville's *Mardi, Pierre,* and *The Confidence Man;* or such challenging readings as those of *The Scarlet Letter* and *Moby-Dick* — readings, of course, from the perspective of the symbolic theme, but readings that will force us to our advantage to reexamine the total works.

For these reasons I feel certain that Mr. Feidelson's book will take its place among the seminal books on American literature and cultural history — with Perry Miller's *The New England Mind,* Matthiessen's *American Renaissance,* and Constance Rourke's *American Humor.* And because of the application of the skills of the new criticism to the history of ideas, it also belongs with such recent efforts in methodological pioneering as Henry Nash Smith's *Virgin Land.* The least that can be said for it, is that anyone who would know our major writers and the "mind" of their age must read it along with Matthiessen and Yvor Winters' *Maule's Curse.* For, where Matthiessen saw these writers chiefly in relation to the metaphysical tradition of the seventeenth century and was more genuinely interested in their democratic faith than in their aesthetic dilemmas, Mr. Feidelson plumbs the dilemmas in the light of our native tradition. And where Winters finds in these writers the curse of obscurantism, Mr. Feidelson, as fully aware of the tragic aspects of the symbolic imagination, sees an honest endeavor to face up to the problems it set them.

And there is a tendency in Matthiessen and Winters, as in American literary history generally, to place Hawthorne and Melville over against Emerson, Thoreau, and Whitman, and to treat Poe by himself. If one makes the recognition of the reality of evil the criterion — and our generation apparently does — then Hawthorne and Melville are the great writers. If one favors Hawthorne's themes and therefore his kind of imagination, then it is hard to accept Poe's. Matthiessen studies Poe uncomfortably, reverencing him for his influence on French symbolism and modern aesthetics, not for his work.

These divisions and judgments, useful as they are, minimize the considerable

kinship of these authors, a kinship that is only possible in an age beset with a common problem. The common problem was methodological, at once philosophical and aesthetic. In the 1830's American thinkers discovered in Kant and the Post-Kantians that there had been a speculative movement that could arm them to overcome the sterility and paralysis their generation had inherited from a disintegrating Puritanism. The Puritan tradition had held in precarious harmony a circumscribed symbolic imagination and a sturdy rationalism. The products of the symbolic imagination were suspect: metaphor was considered ornamental, rhetoric was decoration. The analytical Puritan tried to resolve the metaphor into its "parts." Imagination remained only in the service of God, in the reading of His providences and in the study of types — the prefigurements in the Old Testament of the events of the New. The Ramist method, which they preferred to the Aristotelian, was a technique of dichotomy, a logic of discrete "arguments" — preëminently a tool of analysis. This exaltation of analytic method at the expense of the imaginative processes of thought not only rent the tenuous fabric of Puritan theology, according to Mr. Feidelson, but hampered the growth of American art.

For rational language could not render the fulness of religious experience, an experience akin to aesthetic apprehension. But it could be used to destroy the unity of the religious symbol and to undermine the faith: where such irreconcilable doctrines as God-the-Ruler and God-the-subject-of-Law could be harmonized in the symbol of the Covenant, a searching logic could wedge them apart. And whatever dogma a sect set up as the Truth could be similarly splintered, as the Puritan church was splintered into its multitudes of sects. It was this kind of logic-chopping, aided in the eighteenth century by Lockean method, that generated new creeds, until William Ellery Channing, Bushnell, and Emerson recognized that the Truth claimed by each was partial and that the Truth they really sought, the Truth that really covered religious experience, would have to come from a willingness to join contradictory ideas. Rational method, because of its abstractive nature, could not encompass Truth; only a symbolic language, formed out of the fulness of intuitive vision, could harmonize the opposites contained in living experience.

For this reason, Transcendentalism (and Emerson, its spokesman) has so important a place in the liberation of American literature. In trying to be true to religious experience, it was being true to all experience; and as a doctrine of experience, it was a program for the artist. In fighting the rational method of Locke, Transcendentalism rediscovered the symbolic imagination, and found in symbolic language a way to reconcile the dualism that Locke perpetuated. Locke, and for that matter Kant, had maintained a gulf between the knower and the known, between subject and object. In symbolic apprehension, however, the knower became one with the known. And in symbolic language the word was no longer a sign for the unknowable thing: it was interpretative of reality; it formed it in the moment when the mind used the word as the portal into matter and matter made it the portal to the mind. Symbolic perception, then, created a world of language which was neither subjective nor objective, but transcended both. Such symbols were known, as they always have been, in the act of perception that is prior to abstractive (rational) processes of thought. As a result of this kind of imaginative perception, the mechanical universe was given its organic fulness, what had been static became a process, and what

had been discrete became related. If the fulness was a flux, still to the impoverished artist it provided an amplitude of meanings (relations); and it made language the plastic medium in which they could be formed, in which there were innumerable possibilities for the synthetic occasion.

In this way the artist was given a function: he stood at the center of an organic universe that was in itself symbolic throughout; and by establishing relations to that universe through vision, he entered into its meanings — his thoughts became part of the world. The passport was language. And Emerson discovered that symbolic language was an autonomous realm, independent of the artist's personality and excluding the objective standpoint that might check its proliferating meanings. For him what mattered most was the abundance of meanings; he had found a world of "significances," shifting and sliding, but rich beyond anything dreamed of in Lockean philosophy. He did not hunger, as Melville did, to rationalize Truth; he never felt the need to fix with the reason what could only be perceived by imagination. And he saved himself from Melville's scepticism by enjoying the symbolic precipitate of each moment of vision, assured that he was ever tending toward a fuller approximation of the absolute. By minimizing the contradictions of experience in his desire for unity, however, he can be said to have given us the symbolic program without sounding its potentially destructive elements.

For in practice, the potentialities for disaster are seen to be inherent in symbolism itself. The symbolic imagination must return for its control to a fixed standpoint outside of itself. To become successful art, it must forsake the symbol's epistemological function, returning to the conscious artist (the mind) or to objective fact (matter). The artistic success of symbolism, therefore, is a capitulation to a necessary rationalism. This is the tragedy that is played out in human thought between the two modes of thought that for Emerson characterized the mind. In the work of Melville and Gide that Mr. Feidelson analyzes, one can see how the theme of symbolic literature has become its own methodological dilemma. Melville, for example, was liberated as an artist when he discovered the resources of ambiguity; but an endless ambiguity did not satisfy the rational itch for certainty. The unfolding significances of symbolism were as inscrutable to the rational mind as the organic universe itself was inscrutable if approached rationally. Where Emerson cast his faith for unity, Melville was left with the scepticism of diversity. And his rational distrust of easy unity weakened his faith in imagination, until, in *Pierre* and *The Confidence Man,* he wrote the tragedy and comedy of the "Fools of Truth." Knowing that all human thought "counterfeits" the Truth, art became impossible for him and he retreated into silence.

There will be critics enough who will find in Mr. Feidelson's study of the tragedy of symbolism a warrant for the death of the modern literary movement. I think they will have misread out of their distrust of the imagination or misconception of our present concern with meaning. The meaning of meaning is not an intellectual fad, but the problem of our intellectual inheritance: Mr. Feidelson makes that clear. If there is tragedy between the incommensurability of reason and imagination — tragedy within the very process of human thought — how can we blink it? A symbolist, like Gide, who has made this the theme of *Les Faux-monnayeurs,* reminds us that there is victory for imagination as well as defeat in this peculiar tragedy of modern consciousness.